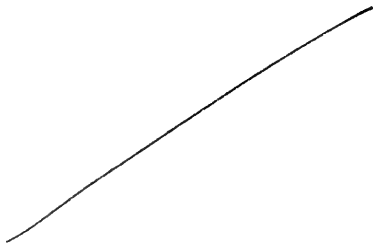


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W. E. Williams.



THE INSPIRATION OF POETRY

EIGHT LECTURES ON POETIC ENERGY
DELIVERED BEFORE THE LOWELL
INSTITUTE OF BOSTON, 1906



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THE INSPIRATION OF POETRY

BY

GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

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THE INSPIRATION OF POETRY

I

POETIC MADNESS

THROUGH all the space of years, from the morning of the world almost till yesterday, the poets were a race apart; mortal, they yet shed a celestial gleam; dying, they remained deathless; more than any other class of men they typified immortality. The Greeks, those originators of the intellectual life, fixed for us the idea of the poet. He was a divine man; more sacred than the priest, who was at best an intermediary between men and the gods, but in the poet the god was present and spoke. "For," said Socrates to Ion, "not by art does the poet sing, but by power divine. . . . God takes away the minds of poets and uses them as His ministers, as He also uses diviners and holy prophets, in order that we who hear them may know them to be speaking not of them-

selves who utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness, but that God Himself is the speaker, and that through them He is conversing with us." The poets themselves give the same testimony. Spenser says that poetry is "no art, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct, not to be gotten by labour and learning, but adorned with both; and poured into the witte by a certaine Enthousiasmos and celestiall inspiration;" Shelley has the same doctrine in mind when he says, "Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man." Poetic energy, according to this view, is inspiration, anciently conceived as a madness taking possession of the poet, and in more modern times as a divine prompting of the reasonable soul. This is the unbroken tradition of literature from the beginning with respect to the nature of poetic power.

It is to be feared, however, that this doctrine to-day has little convincing force. Even in the words of Socrates there is a suspicion of irony, and perhaps Spenser and Shelley put more faith in their own words than ever their readers have done. Yet when

all reservations have been made, there remain in the thoughts of all of us respecting poetry some glimmerings and decays, at least, of the idea of inspiration. It is the vogue nowadays, when any question is asked with regard to the soul, to apply first to the anthropologist; and, indeed, to inquire concerning the history of an idea is one of the best means to inform ourselves of its meaning. It might be pleasant to enter the charmed circle of the Greek myth, to listen for snatches of Lityerses' song like music before dawn, and have sight of Orpheus, a shining figure on the border of the morning; but such a procedure would only discredit our argument. It is necessary to go to the anthropologist and be wise.

What does the student of primitive man tell of poetry at her birth? In place of the divine child, upon whose mouth bees clung in the cradle, what does the anthropologist show us? He shows us the dancing horde. "On festal occasions," says a recent writer, "the whole horde meets by night round the camp-fire for a dance. Men and women alternating form a circle; each dancer lays

his arms about the necks of his two neighbors, and the entire ring begins to turn to the right or to the left, while all the dancers stamp strongly and in rhythm the foot that is advanced, and drag after it the other foot. Now with drooping heads they press closer and closer together; now they widen the circle. Throughout the dance resounds a monotonous song." The song is sometimes one sound interminably repeated; sometimes it is more extended, as, for example, the words "Good hunting," or "Now we have something to eat," or "Brandy is good." In that undifferentiated, homogeneous social state called the horde, there was no poet, just as there were no other men with particular callings; but all the horde were poets; and this, which I have read, was their poetry. Such is the anthropologist's account, and it is a true account. Indeed, it is plain from the evidence that primitive men found many utilities in rhythmical expression. Rhythm was used to mark time in joint labor and on the march, as it is still employed by sailors, boatmen, and soldiers; the songs of labor and of war have this origin; and in that primeval

time, when language was hardly formed upon the lips of men, rhythm was the means by which the joint expression of emotion was effected on festive occasions. Rhythm was, so far as expression was concerned, the social bond. Lying on the sands at the base of the pyramids, or amid the ruins of Luxor, as the afternoon wore on, I have heard the chant begin among the throng of workmen, and as they hurried by with their baskets of earth it was no fancy for me to believe that in their shrill, unceasing, and ever louder cry I listened to the cradle hymn of poetry.

If one looks at the matter more closely, the seeming gap between these sharply opposed conceptions of the divine poet and the singing and dancing horde begins to disappear. Greek tradition itself gives the clew to their reconciliation. Socrates, in the passage which I have quoted, compares the poet to the wild Bacchic revellers in their frenzy, — that is, to what is no more nor less than the singing horde of Dionysus in their sacred orgy. The history of the Greek stage shows clearly how tragedy was developed from an original joint exercise about

the altar of Dionysus, in which all united; it was only by the gradual change of time that the assembly fell apart into the audience on one side and the performers on the other, and even then, you know, the chorus remained as the delegate of the whole assembly until in turn it also yielded to the ever increasing function of the actors, and theatrical individuality in dramatic performances was fully developed. Without entering upon detail, the Greek tradition indicates the evolution of poetry from its social form as the joint rhythm of the horde to its individual form as the song of the divine poet who held all others silent when he discoursed. In this evolution the poetic energy itself remains the same, however much its form may change; whatever explanation may be given, whether it be regarded as divine or human, the phenomenon is continuous and identical.

The first radical trait of poetry throughout is the presence of emotion; and this to so marked a degree that it is characteristically described as madness. Civilized men sometimes forget the immense sphere of emotion in the history of the race. It is still

familiar to us in the actions of mobs, in the blind fury or blind panic to which swarms of men are subject. In history we read of such emotion seizing on the people as in the time of the Flagellants, who went about scourging themselves in the streets, or generally in periods of revolutionary enthusiasm. Such emotion is known to us, also, in orgiastic or devotional dances, in the old-fashioned revivals, and in the fury of battle that possesses every nation when its chiefs have declared war. This is the broad emotional power in the race that is the fountain of poetry. Emotion is far older than intellect in human life; and even now reason plays but a faint and faltering part in human affairs. If in the civilized portions of the world the ungoverned outburst is less than it was, or seems less, it is mainly because in civilization emotion has found fixed channels.

This emotion, which is the fountain of poetry, it should be observed, is the broad fund of life; it is nothing individual; it is always shared emotion. The second radical trait of poetic energy, therefore, is that it is social. The poet, however aloof he may be, is always

in company with the hearts that beat with his own heart, and like Saadi —

“He wants them all,
Nor can dispense
With Persia for his audience:”

for he is the voice of his people. In times past, and on the great scale of literary history, this is evident; nor is it less true of the most solitary lyrical poet of modern days than of the old dramatist or epic bard; for even that most secretive poetry, which we fitly say is “overheard,” has its value in proportion to its being overheard by the like-minded, whose minds it fills. The third trait of poetic energy, as seen in its continuous phenomena, is that it is controlled emotion. Rhythm is used from the beginning to control movement, as when two men strike alternately in a common work; or, as when rowers dip their oars together; or, as when the throng dances in chorus; and at the same time it governs the unisons of the emotional cries. Rhythm is the germ of art, its simplest form; and poetic art as distinguished from poetic energy may be defined as the principle of control in the emo-

tion in play. Poetic energy, then, as it appears historically, is shared and controlled emotion; it is primordial energy rising out of the vague of feeling; it is social; and for the principle of its control in general there is no better word than music, or harmony in the old, broad sense of that term.

It is one of the difficulties, I fancy, of the staid New England folk who sit at the feet of Emerson, to find the sage affirming that the perfect state of life is ecstasy. From the beginning to the end he repeatedly announced this law; and by ecstasy he meant precisely what the Greeks meant by poetic madness. In his essay on poetry he puts his finger on the ailing place when he says that American poetry lacks abandonment, and he extends the diagnosis to all American life when he exclaims: "O celestial Bacchus! drive them mad, — this multitude of vagabonds, hungry for eloquence, hungry for poetry, starving for symbols, perishing for want of electricity to vitalize this too much pasture, and in the long delay indemnifying themselves with the false wine of alcohol, of politics, or of money." In many passages

Emerson thus pleads for the principle of the dervish, the mænad, the god-intoxicated man, in whatever sphere of life; the man who is self-abandoned to the energy of life that wells up within him, and in being "passion's slave" finds his illumination and his enfranchisement.

I know that it is common when the masters give expression to such bewildering ideas to say that they did not mean what they said, and to explain away the words by a liberal application of common sense. But it is more likely that the masters do not say half what they mean; for in such souls, living in a white heat of conviction, expression lags far behind their faith. It is but just to Emerson, however, to add that he had adopted the idea from others, and he naïvely remarks that it is singular that our faith in ecstasy exists in spite of our almost total inexperience of it. The doctrine itself, nevertheless, is one of the most persistent of human beliefs, and is always springing up in some quarter of the world.

We have to do only with the fact that from the beginning to a late period of civilization

poetic genius was identified with a certain madness. The poet was the heir of the wild and frenzied bands of Dionysus. In this case, however, the madness is slowly qualified. Whether poetic ecstasy is divinely inspired, whether it be the most perfect state of life, or whether it is only a survival from that period of exaltation which may have accompanied man's escape from brutish life, is not at present the question. It is not characterized by an unbalanced or diseased reason or by any temporary fury and aberration; it is characterized rather by a suspension of reason. The plain truth appears to be no more than that, in proportion to the degree of emotional excitement, the operation of the mind tends to become instinctive, and in the crisis of passion becomes wholly so. The two traits that most struck observers of poetic inspiration were its involuntary and its unconscious character. The will is laid to sleep, and the mind works without conscious self-direction. Any lyrical poet, like Goethe, for example, is familiar with the process; he looks upon some scene with no thought of writing verses, and

suddenly, out of nowhere, the song sings itself in his brain, and his only part in it is to remember and write it down. It is not more strange in the case of a poet, whose brain is beat into rhythm, that a mood should so discharge itself in musical images than that when you sit down before the fire, vivid pictures should of themselves rise before your mind in revery. The spontaneous action of the mind, carrying with it oblivion of self, seems the essential factor in poetic inspiration, as it is known to us from the poets' autobiographies. Emotion is the unloosed force; and always emotion tends to obliterate the reason, not only by dulling and destroying the principle of caution, but also to such a degree that after the access of emotion has passed, words and even acts are brokenly, and sometimes not at all, recalled.

It is to be borne in mind that emotion of this drifting and possessing sort is primary in human nature. It may well be that the state of primitive man was more dreamlike than we easily fancy, that as he emerged from the brute his mental state was still casual, lax,

uncertain, subject to torpid intervals, and coursed by waves of panic fear and strange expectancy. The great effort of civilization has been, and still is, the attempt to introduce a principle of control into that casual swarm of impressions which makes up men's thought and of which, especially when swayed by emotion, spontaneous action is the law. The poet, then, under excitement, seems to present the phenomenon of a highly developed mind working in a primitive way; what is called his madness denotes nothing abnormal, but is rather an unusually perfect illustration of the normal action of emotion in a pure form; he is mad in so far as he does not call either will or reason to his aid, but allows unimpeded course to the instinctive expression of passion.

Passion, then, is the birthright of the poet; without it he is nothing. That is why the poet so works himself into the hearts of men; for emotion is fundamental in life; as a possession, as an energy, life has its value in its emotional moments. It is true that now for a long while we have tried to intellectualize life; it is the great aim of

literary education. But the life that is led in thought, from history and travel and learning through all its compass, is life at second-hand. The reality lies, in general, in emotional contact. If two men exchange thoughts, they are fellow-beings; if they share an emotion, they are brother men. The poet comes, and either reflects or arouses emotion and shares the gift he brings, and is thus always and in all lands the dear comrade of men. Emotion is the fusing force which unites the poet with his fellow-men; but first in his own career it has united him with life.

The mode in which it does so is simple. It is most plain in that part of experience which directly addresses the senses and is absorbed therein. The poet who is especially open to the things of nature, for example, to color and bloom and weather, to the motion of the seas and the infinity of the stars, to the exhilaration of a swim or a ride, does with his body drink the light of the world and the joy of existence. How many pages of the most welcome verse simply reflect this natural joy of living! It is not

the image but the delight of the image, not the event but the joy of the event that exalts sensation into poetry. In a similar way emotion fuses the poet with ideas. The type is, of course, the fanatic who is so possessed with the idea that he becomes no more than its instrument and living embodiment. The revolutionary poets display this power with clearness; in the great songs of the French Revolution the Dionysiac quality, the presence of the mad throng, the singing horde, had its last great literary illustration; but wherever a poet sings the causes of mankind, there is this fanatical blending of his own soul with the idea. But whether in the senses or in the soul, emotion throughout the field is the life itself; thought is only the means of life; and even in the case where great thoughts, such as scientific conceptions, of themselves generate sublime emotion, the consummation of the thought is not in the knowledge but in the emotion.

The sign of the poet, then, is that by passion he enters into life more than other men. That is his gift, — the power to live.

The lives of poets are but little known; but from the fragments of their lives that come down to us, the characteristic legend is that they have been singularly creatures of passion. They lived before they sang. Emotion is the condition of their existence; passion is the element of their being; and, moreover, the intensifying power of such a state of passion must also be remembered, for emotion of itself naturally heightens all the faculties, and genius burns the brighter in its own flames. The poet craves emotion, and feeds the fire that consumes him, and only under this condition is he baptized with creative power. It is to be expected, therefore, that the tradition of the poet's life should have an element of strangeness in it; and, in fact, to neglect those cases where genius has touched the border of actual madness, every poet has this stamp of destiny set upon him. There is always some wildness in his nature; he is apt to be roving, adventurous, unforeseen; he is without fear, he is careless of his life, he is not to be commanded; freedom is what he most dearly loves, and he will have it at any peril; that from which

he will not be divided is the primeval heritage, the Dionysiac madness that resides not only in the instincts, but in all the faculties of man, — the power and the passion to live. It is a widespread error, and due only to the academic second-hand practice of poetry, to oppose the poet to the man of action, or assign to him a merely contemplative rôle in life, or in other ways deny reality to the poet's experience; intensity of living is preliminary to all great expression. From the beginning, about the rude altar of the god, to the days of Goethe, of Leopardi, and of Victor Hugo, the poet is the leader in the dance of life; and the phrase by which we name his singularity, the poetic temperament, denotes the primacy of that passion in his blood with which the frame of other men is less richly charged.

The poet seems always a lonely figure; but this is the paradox that the more lonely he is, the more he is a leader. The second trait of poetic energy is that it is a social power, and this is no whit less essential than its emotional basis. It is true that in early times poetic energy in its rude forms,

as the rhythm of labor, of war, and of the feast, had a larger social place and extended more widely over primitive life; it was not then individualized at all. Rhythm originally was more obviously the social bond, in joint movements of the throng, than it is now in the arts developed out of it, — sculpture, music, and poetry. The greatness of all the arts, it has been widely and justly proclaimed, lies in their social character; in so far as they minister only to individuals they are sterilized. Literature is the greatest of the arts because its social scope is most extended and most penetrating. What holy cities are to nomadic tribes, — a symbol of race and a bond of union, — great books are to the wandering souls of men; they are the Meccas of the mind. Homer was to Greece another Delphi. In the geography of the mind national literatures stand like mountain ranges, marking the great emotional upheavals of the race; such are the sacred books of all peoples; such was the literature of Greece, the glory that shone when reason came to birth among men; such were the outburst of Italian poetry and the partic-

ular periods of greatness in the modern literatures of Europe. Great literatures, in other words, are formed along the lines of fracture in the social advance of the race. It is true that supreme social value seems to belong rather to the books of past ages; but this is largely an error of perspective, for distance is essential to the measurement. The race is content to live long on the memory of such achievement; and the channels of social emotion on the great scale having been once worked out, the moods of men flow therein for a long age.

The fixity of these ancient channels, too, is an essential factor in the problem of poetic energy. Plato recommended that no poetry be allowed in the state except hymns of a fixed ceremonial character; and curiously the fact is that literature always tends to approach that state of tradition. Life everywhere hardens into formulas; and thus in literature books become established as classics, schools of poetry become academic, expression becomes formulistic. Emotion, that is, discharges itself through accustomed channels, through images and phrases and

cadences that have become its known language; as, for example, was the case with that special form of poetry known as Petrarchan. The emotion is genuine, but the form is old. When it has been shown that Shakspeare employed in his sonnets the conventional European expression of emotion, it has not been shown that the emotion was not genuine, but merely that the poet used a conventionalized art. How much of reality can exist in conventionalized art the whole early history of painting and sculpture shows. The expression of emotion is generally conventional, and the more social it is, the more is it conventionalized.

The poet, therefore, new born in the world, finds the field preoccupied. Religion, for example, is supplied with literary expression in its Bibles and hymns, and besides has the works of the other arts, architecture, sculpture, painting, and music, and, in addition, the splendor and awe of its ritual. The national passion, patriotism, finds embodiment for itself in long-established literature as well as in other ways. In fact, the poet finds social emotion already ritualized, if I may say so, in every part of

life. He enters into no rivalry with the work which has already been accomplished by his predecessors; he rejoices in it, but it is not his work. It follows that the new poet is necessarily the exponent of emotion in new fields or turned toward new objects; he is an experimenter, as it were, in life; and this accounts often for his hard fate. If he is to be great, he is already on that line of fracture in social evolution of which I have just spoken. He sometimes stands in the light of an unrisen day. Hence, in his own time, he may appear even antisocial. How often has the poet been denounced as an atheist, as a revolutionist, an innovator, a wild thinker and rash actor, and always as a dreamer! It is because his natural habitat is there, in the new and unknown stir of the world coming to birth. It is altogether natural that he should be discredited, unrecognized or disowned, that he should go hungry and often starve, that he should die in poverty and neglect, that the very name of the poet in history should be a synonym for sorrow and want. This has been his lot in all ages, and if any poet has escaped it, he

has done so by a miracle. The contrast between his poor and solitary state and his after fame is one of the fascinations that fasten the eyes of men upon him. It seems strange that a great social force should have resided in so despised an individual. But the world's work is not done in crowds, though crowds are the instruments and beneficiaries of it. Where the man of science in his lonely study or silent laboratory toils in secret, where Newton or Pasteur works, there the brain of the race thinks, and wins its slow advance on the unknown; and where the poet is, though he be in the wilderness, there the heart of the race beats. The poet, born for the future, will be found always in the thick of ideas and in the heat of the glowing world of change; he takes into his single breast the rising mass, and shapes upon his lips in silence the master words of many thousand men.

It might appear that the poet, who is thus a creature of passion and in the whirl of new social forces, is doomed to abide in a state of chaos; and the poet, in a certain sense, is the most lawless of men. Yet, as I have indi-

cated, there is a principle of control; it is art. The original element of art is rhythm, that very measure of which the primitive cadence still times the poet's utterance; and it is true that the mere music of verse has a power of itself "in the very torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of passion" to beget a temperance that gives it smoothness. But art, though growing historically out of mere rhythm, is a broader principle, and as it grows, it becomes more and more an intellectual thing. In Nietzsche's phrase, this is Apollo's domain, the realm of intellect; for form is an intellectual thing. The dream, which accompanies emotion, is in truth its other and finite incarnation; it is the woof of color and image, — all that is especially taken note of by the eye, which is the most intellectual of the senses, and by the understanding, which is the eye of the mind; whether in its physical representation, which is woven of the senses, or in its bodiless conception, which belongs to the higher life of moral contemplation and abstract truth, it is the idea; and it is this accompanying dream, this idea, this form of art, which

gives relief to the emotion, disburdens, and quiets it.

The idea in this sense is the sphere of form; it is in this dream that the mind works, that art resides. It is this, too, that gives character to the emotion; for emotion is noble or base, wise or foolish, a power to save or a power to ruin, according to the objects and events toward which it is directed and the mode in which it envelops them. The development of the idea, the arrangement of its parts and phases, the order of the ode or the drama or the epic in unfolding its theme, is in poetry the labor of art; it is what composition is in sculpture or painting. This art, however, in the sense of a principle of control, has two modes; one lies in the dream itself, in its original emanation from the mind, in its substance; the other lies in its handling. The substance of the dream is one thing; the handling of it is another; and it is to the handling that what is called technique, the most conscious form of art, specially refers. It is to be borne in mind, however, that just as poetic energy is not something brought down from heaven,

but is the fire and motion of life itself, so the dream that attends emotion is not something artificially and arbitrarily united with it, but is given forth from it, and is as naturally joined there as the flower to the root. Try as one may, one cannot in poetry — not even in its art — escape from the omnipresence of this secret power, the mystery that gives forth life, of that which is beneath all. It is one great use of works of art that they teach our eyes to see, even in nature and human life as they are, the beauty with which they are clothed in their actuality. Emotion, in its own natural expression, is a beautiful or pathetic or terrifying sight. There is an unconscious power in life itself to clothe its own emanation so; and of this power art is the follower in imagination. In the poet this instinctive power in himself gives the dream, the substance; he cannot tell how it arises in him; it comes as the smile comes to the lips or tears to the eyes — he knows not whence they are; and, furthermore, he is not yet the poet, but only the novice, if his technical skill is not also instinctively applied and the arrangement of the theme instinc-

tively accomplished. In the stroke of genius there is no calculation. The poet does not scan his verses nor hunt his rhymes, any more than the musical composer seeks for concords; still less does he search for color and image and idea. He is as unconscious of his processes, even when originally acquired with difficulty, as the athlete is of the play of his muscles. The mastery of technique is, indeed, necessary to the novice, but it is only the tuning of the instrument; conscious art must pass into the hand, the eye, the brain, the heart, and there be forgotten, nor does it become true power until it is so forgotten. The dream, the idea, both in its substance and its handling, its constituting form and its technique, is, in the work of genius, instinctive; unless it be so, it is flawed and incomplete. Art is a perfect principle of control only when it thus operates, as rhythm does, like a law of nature, from which, in fact, it is not to be distinguished; for it is that secret law of harmony unveiled in man's nature.

Poetic energy, so conceived, is a phenomenon of the spiritual nature of man, and is ruled, both in emotion and in idea, by its

own inward law. The passion of life embodies itself in all men according as they have the power to live, in experience; and in the poets it embodies itself in imagination. The passion of life, which is the great mystery of the universe, shapes unto itself many forms in different ages, in different climes, under different gods. It has many births; and the miracle of this mystery is the diversity of these births, the novelty and surprise of each new morning as it breaks upon a world whose law is death and which is forever passing away. I said that the poet is the most lawless of men; that is because he lives in an ampler law, because the life that is born in him refuses to be bound in the old births of time; he breaks all conventions, he tramples on all superstitions, he violates all barriers; for he brings his own world with him, and new horizons. Emerson said that the birth of a poet is the chief event in chronology. He means that they mark the great changes in the minds of men. Wherever such a change is nigh, wherever the flame of life bursts forth with most power and splendor, there the poet is found; he is the morning and the evening

star of civilizations. He is but one among men, but in his single soul the soul of mankind comes to fullest consciousness of itself and is illuminated from horizon to horizon, from height to depth. He seems to men divine because he thus gives to them the divine part of themselves. His fame may be swift or slow, but in the end it fills the world. He is lawless, judged by the finite; but in his passion and his dream he has given himself to a higher law, and reposes on the infinite, of which he is the latest birth. So it seems to him. In these lectures I shall present the genius of six of these poets as illustrations of that passion and power of life in which poetic energy consists.

II

MARLOWE

1

MARLOWE is the very type of the poet whom I have described. "Mad" is the first epithet that comes to our lips in thinking of him, — "mad Marlowe," — whether one looks at the wildness of his unregulated career or at the tameless force embodied in his genius or at the romantic extravaganza that is the body of his literary achievement. Brief and tragic were the annals of his life. He was born two months before Shakspeare; son of a shoemaker at Canterbury; educated at school and college; a scholar when he came down from Cambridge to London, which he entered the same year with Shakspeare; favored by the theatres and the public; a wild liver, impulsive, passionate, uncontrolled, giving his genius free way with himself for the eight years of his manhood during which he did his work; faithful to his intellectual part

and industrious as he must have been to have accomplished all that he did; and killed in a tavern brawl at the age of thirty. This is all that we know of him; yet in every line of this story one knows that it is the epitaph of genius. He was in his own day denounced as an atheist and blasphemer, and his death was long cited as a notable instance of God's sudden justice. "Not inferior to these," says one account, "was one Christopher Marlow, by profession a play-maker, who, as it is reported, about 14 years ago wrote a book against the Trinity. But see the effects of God's justice! It so happened that at Detford, a little village about three miles distant from London, as he meant to stab with his ponyard one named Ingram that had invited him hither to a feast and was then playing at tables, he quickly perceiving it so avoided the thrust that withal, drawing out his dagger for his defense, he stabbed this Marlow into the eye in such sort that, his braines coming out at the dagger's point, he shortly after died. Thus did God, the true executioner of divine justice, work the end of impious atheists." So runs the Puritan's ac-

count of this tragic episode; and it is altogether likely that Marlowe, lawless in all ways, was a free-thinker, and being a child of the Italian Renaissance was then intellectually what was called Machiavellian in his ideas.

Notwithstanding this grewsome picture of the atheist's bloody death, it was not thus that the poets of that age saw the protagonist of their company who brought in "the spacious times of great Elizabeth." Their tributes to his memory make us aware of an exceptional quality in the man, of the burning of a fire in him such as no other of his comrades knew the touch of, of something that transfigured him; and this transfiguration is seen in the fact that he alone of all that group was idealized by them in fancy. The poets brought flowers as if to hide the corpse of that grisly memory of his death. It is much that he who lay there was Shakspeare's "dead shepherd." The other lesser poets, whenever they speak of him, are instinctively touched with imaginative fantasy. Chapman, invoking the Muse, bids her seek Marlowe's spirit, and after death

“find the eternal clime
Of his free soul, whose living subject stood
Up to the chin in the Pierian flood”;

and in the flowing line we seem to feel the full flood of that stream of poetry as it broke forth in its own age. Drayton's oft-quoted words transmit the strange fire that was in the young poet's whole frame like a second soul:—

“Next Marlow, bathed in the Thespian springs,
Had in him those brave translunary things
That the first poets had; his raptures were
All air and fire which made his verses clear;
For that fine madness still he did retain
Which rightly should possess a poet's brain.”

Personal fascination survives in this description, — the transcendency of genius, seen, felt, touched, as it were, in its mortal body by mortal senses. Still another youthful poet, like Chapman, following the spirit with praise after death,

“where Marlo's gone
To live with beauty in Elyzium,” —

gives us the contemporary glow of enthusiasm for Marlowe's eloquent and musical fancy: —

“Whose silver-charming tongue moved such delight
That men would shun their sleep in still dark night
To meditate upon his golden lines.”

It is by the light of such tributes as these that we recall and re-create the young poet, — in his rise the star of the Elizabethan morning, in his tragic fall, as Lowell called him, “the herald that dropped dead in announcing the victory in whose fruits he was not to share.”

“Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burnèd is Apollo’s laurel bough,”

we cry; the sense of the limitless power and suggestion of genius blends with the accident of its extinction in its first burst, — the pathos of what was never to be, the tragedy of a soul of price lost to mankind; and with this mood dumbly mingles the universal feeling of some darkness in poetic fate, and obtains mastery of the heart and controls insensibly the judgment. To all later poets, as to his contemporaries, Marlowe is a younger brother, struck by the shaft of unkind gods; something of that transfiguration that his fellows saw — the silver flood of beauty about him, the miraculous fire within him — still lingers,

and he stays to abide our question rather in his spirit, in the might of unaccomplished resources, than in any created work that came from his hand.

One work there is, however, in which his youthfulness stands revealed, his tastes and sensibilities, the richness of his emotions, and the warmth of his life. The translation he made after Moschus, called "Hero and Leander," gave to English literature its single work of the pagan paradise, and it shows such an endowment of the soul and body of passion in the hand that wrote it and the heart that brooded it, as leaves its young author among English poets without a rival for sensuous happiness. The poem still stands alone; neither its mood nor its music has ever since been heard in England. It was plainly this poem that clothed Marlowe with that atmosphere of the golden age in which his brother poets saw him stand. By it he became for them the heir of classic beauty and the living token of that voluptuousness in the joys of the imagination which was the poetic charm of the Italian Renaissance; and to them he stood forth like an inhabitant

of that fair realm, native to that air, and mixed with the figures and the landscape of his own vision. We can realize only faintly the power with which this great movement, the Renaissance, the new and second birth of man's intellect and senses, came upon the nations of the West; with what vital surprise, what energizing force, what kindling impulses along the nerves of will and desire, with what intoxication of intellectual curiosity and artistic passion, this renovation of life in Italy fell in the second century of its accumulated mass, and made impact through a thousand channels on such an age as Elizabeth's and on such a fiery and sensitive temperament, such an originative and shaping genius as Marlowe's. This little poem, nevertheless, is like a single blossom from that world-wide field, and may give us the hue and fragrance of the Renaissance in flower, if we will: so a rose shadows us with Persia, or a single lotus blossom unbosoms all the Nile.

One quality the poem has, which specially characterizes it as Marlowe's handiwork, — an excitement of the imagination resulting in

exuberance of fancy, a stream of decorative art, an incessant welling up of imagery and epithet in profuse and exhaustless abundance; no poem is so fluent, so effortless, so negligently rich in this regard, so prodigal in its spending of the coin of fancy. In that age when all the seas first yielded to man, imagination, too, made her voyages of discovery, and brought home gold and pearl and the marvel of the loom from every clime; many a passage in the poets of those days is a museum in itself; and of this rifled wealth of the Elizabethan world, heaped from antique and oriental sources and every quarter of learning or of fable, Marlowe was a master. In "Hero and Leander" he showed only his prentice hand in this lavish piracy. It is, nevertheless, even there a sign of that overflowingness which stamped his genius from the first as of a royal nature. He had neither to search nor to hoard, but only to spend. It was not, however, in a love episode, a few hundred lines in length, however stored with languor and beauty, that he was to show his wealth, but on the broad stage of England. The poet, nevertheless, was prior to the dramatist in

Marlowe, as indeed all the Elizabethans were poets first and dramatists afterwards; and it was this poet, the child of Italy and the Hellespont breathing English air, that his brother poets loved and immortalized, before ever his greater fame as the first fashioner of a noble and lofty style for English drama was even dreamed of.

I own that the early English drama has caused me much weariness even in my youthful days, and neither would I now voluntarily read it, nor should I have the heart to subject any other to the trial. For men of English speech the drama is necessarily measured by Shakspeare; and in a certain sense he raises his fellows to his own neighborhood. So, when one stands upon the highest summit of some many-folded range of hills, the mere loftiness of his station makes the lower crowns, distinct and bold beneath him, seem little inferior; but when, on the other hand, descending, he makes one of them his perch, how the lonely monarch soars aloft! Thus it is when from Shakspeare's height men survey his fellows, the swelling names of that Elizabethan cluster.

“Marlowe,” they say, “on whose dawn-flushed brow the morning clouds too soon crept with envious vapors that the most golden of Apollo’s shafts should never pierce more; Beaumont and Fletcher, twins of the summer noontide, and Chapman bearing his weight of forests with the ease and might of old Titans; Ford and Webster who made their home with the tempest and seemed to leash the thunder;” and so on with all the others of the tremendous upheaval of the age. But when one leaves Shakspeare’s ground, and descends to any of these, how tumid is all such description, while undiminished the king of the peaks still soars in the sky! It is not by our will that Shakspeare’s altitude is made the measure of other men who were so unfortunate as to be born his rivals; one can help it no more than the eye can help seeing. His genius reduced all his contemporaries to perpetual subjection to itself; no superlatives can be offered in their praise except by his leave, and when their own worth is made known, the last service they do, in showing us how invaluable is Shakspeare’s treasure, is perhaps the most useful.

Even Marlowe, in whose youth, if anywhere in history, was the promise of a mate for Shakspeare, needs the latter's withdrawal before he can tread the stage. Some would say possibly that Shakspeare might not have obtained entrance there with *Lear* and *Othello*, if Marlowe had not first fitted the tragic buskin to the high step of Tamburlaine; and in a sense the retort is just. The highest genius avails itself of those who go before to prepare the way, the road-makers building the paths of speech and opening the provinces of thought; but to be forced to stipulate at the outset that a great name in literature, such as Marlowe's, shall be considered only with reference to his turn in historical development is to make a confession of weakness in the cause; it is to forego his claim to be considered as a writer of universal literature. What the difference is, in Marlowe's case, is tersely indicated by the fact that competent students discern his genius in "*Titus Andronicus*," which in Shakspeare's crown is rather a foil than a gem. This play, with Marlowe's touch still on it, would illustrate, if compared with Shakspeare's un-

doubted work, how cumbrous and stiffening were the shackles of the stage tradition from which Shakspeare freed the art. But in Marlowe's accredited dramas, say, in "Doctor Faustus" (to lay aside the rant of "Tamburlaine" as merely initiatory, tentative, and facile) the necessities of contemporaneous taste and usage are so tyrannical as almost to ruin the work for any other age. "Doctor Faustus" is a series of slightly connected scenes from the life of a conjuror, in which thaumaturgy and the hatred of the Papacy are made to furnish comic horseplay of a clownish kind; or else fear of the devil is used to freeze the blood of the spectators with the horns, hoofs, and fire of coarse horror. Of the dramatic capabilities of the Faust legend as a whole Marlowe indicates no perception. He caught the force of two situations in it, — the invocation of Helen's shadow and the soliloquy; but though in treating these he exhibited genius as bold, direct, and original as Shakspeare's own, they are merely fragmentary. Except in these scenes in which Marlowe's voice really quells his time and sounds alone in the theatre, the uproar of the pit frightens

away the Muse and leaves comedy and tragedy alike to the ruthless disfigurement of the early English stage. In "The Jew of Malta," even if the first two acts are fashioned by dramatic genius as no other but Shakspeare could have moulded them, the last three taper off into the tail of the old monster that had flopped and shuffled on the mediæval boards on every saint's day. In "Edward II" alone is there drama, properly speaking; it is complete, connected, sustained, and it has tenderness, passion, and pathos; but though Swinburne gives it the palm in certain particulars over Shakspeare's "Richard II," which was modelled after it, the former will not bear comparison with the latter in dramatic grasp. To notice but one difference; in Marlowe's work the king's favoritism is so much an infatuation and a weakness that he loses sympathy, and his dethronement, apart from its brutal miseries, is felt to be just; while in Shakspeare Richard's favoritism is retired far in the background, and his faith in his divine right to the crown (never insisted on by Edward) is so eloquent, and so pervades and qualifies the whole play,

that when the king is murdered, one is driven to believe that the bishop's denunciation of God's vengeance on the usurping Lancaster must prove true prophecy. In the matter of dramatic handling there can be no doubt of Shakspeare's more expert sense, though his ideality may make the characterization appear, as it does to Swinburne, less sharp. "Edward II" is Marlowe's best play; but, with this exception, his dramas in general are deeply engaged in the rawness of the time, dependent in many scenes on vulgar spectacle and buffoonery, on burlesque and rout and horror, Tamburlaine's chariot drawn by captive kings in harness, the nose of Barabas, which passed into a proverb for its enormousness, and similar features. So much must be allowed, lest the unwary making acquaintance with these plays should find but strange entertainment. Marlowe, as a dramatist, is not to be judged apart from his historical moment; nor are his works to be appreciated intelligently except by the student of the dramatic development of our stage.

But notwithstanding the crudity of Marlowe's works, as wholes, every page pro-

claims the transcendency of the genius, of the poetic energy, there at work. It is an energy that has a volcanic lift, splendid, terrifying, filling heaven. Marlowe's great achievement, in that age of discoveries and rediscoveries, which, blending together, constituted a renewal of man's life and brought a new world into being, was to rediscover the main source, the fountainhead, of dramatic power. He rediscovered passion, which is the substance of poetry, and made it the substance of the drama. He sympathized with great passions; and in order to sympathize with them he had first to be capable of great passions; that was his endowment. The first and abiding impression he makes upon the reader is that of power, — of the presence in his bosom of the Dionysiac dæmonic force that I spoke of the other night, of that marvellous life-might clothing itself in restless creative faculty and calling new worlds into being in the intellectual sphere. He was a creator, and the clay he used was humanity, the human spirit, the soul. The Renaissance restored to man the dignity of human nature, gave the human spirit back

to itself as a power of life. It unveiled the great achievement of antiquity in literature, in sculpture and architecture, in empire, and, perhaps most notably of all, in men. Nothing is more significant of the mood of the age than the regard in which Plutarch was held. Plutarch was, as it were, a resurrection of the mighty dead of Greece and Rome. The human soul had been capable of such lives, and of such works as the poets and philosophers and artists had wrought in classical times. The example was like a trumpet call; what man had done and been, man could still be and do. The romantic nations, Italy, France, Spain, and England, broke into sudden flower of literature and art and life, as when the sun in its northing clothes the whole hemisphere with springtime, and the force of nature is unloosed like a flood, and belts the planet with new warmth and verdure. It is this unloosing of human faculty that characterizes the age; it was a broader phenomenon than we are apt to think; Shakspeare was but an incident in it.

This force was unloosed in Marlowe; to

him, in his awakening, came the sense of the greatness of man, the miracle of human power, the desire to possess his soul of this greatness, to be in himself this miracle,—the passion of life. Young scholar though he was and hardly fledged from college, he had got more than an education; he had found his mind. If he wrote a book against the Trinity, as was alleged, it is a fact that is certainly not recorded of any other of his fellows, and shows a philosophical interest, a mentality, different in kind from theirs. He was endowed with sensuousness and the warm delight in beauty, that is the rarest of English poetic traits and little welcome in that sluggish climate; he was also endowed with mind; but beneath both endowments lay that deep desire to live, that consciousness of the power to live, that passion to realize his desire in power, and for which there was no other pathway for him than the roads of the imagination. It was natural that what was most borne in upon his mind, the greatness of man and the presence in man's soul of all that potent faculty of which Greece and Rome and Italy were the form

and impression, of which the freshly opened lands and seas, east and west, bore the promise of new world-careers, — it was natural, I say, that this height of human nature which was foremost in his sense of life should be cardinal in his imaginative brooding whence issued the romantic dreams of his mind.

He first seized on the most obvious embodiment of human greatness, military empire, and on the prime barbaric passion, lust of dominion, — on power in its most simple and sensual form, the power of the conqueror; he set forth in “Tamburlaine” the career of resistless victory ridden by a master of the world. Tamburlaine himself proclaims that mastery of inexhaustible ambition which is proper to man: —

“Nature that framed us of four elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world,
And measure every wandering planet’s course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Wills us to wear ourselves and never rest,

Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,
That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown."

For Tamburlaine the crown was the summit, but in the larger yearning of the speech, in such a line as

"Still climbing after knowledge infinite,"

is the keynote of Marlowe's mood in all ways. The drama itself is an unchecked torrent of words, a flood of large language; it has an imperial breadth of flow, and bears the kingdoms like islands on its stream. It has become a synonym for bombast, but it excites and amplifies the imagination by its spaciousness, its epithets like "the hundred-headed Volga," and its terrible energy. There are many splendid passages of impassioned diction, many noble lines such as only the greatest masters know the secret of; but I can best convey to you that quality which I wish to bring out — the new Elizabethan sense of the largeness of the earth and of the dream of empire over it — by the scene in which Tamburlaine at his death calls for the map of the world.

“But I perceive my martial strength is spent.
In vain I strive and rail against those powers
That mean to invest me in a higher throne . . .
Give me a map ; then let me see how much
Is left for me to conquer all the world . . .
Here I began to march toward Persia,
Along Armenia and the Caspian Sea,
And thence unto Bithynia, where I took
The Turk and his great empress prisoners.
Thence marched I into Egypt and Arabia ;
And here, not far from Alexandria,
Whereas the Terrene and the Red Sea meet,
Being distant less than full a hundred leagues,
I meant to cut a channel to them both,
That men might quickly sail to India.
From thence to Nubia near Borno lake,
And so along the Æthiopean Sea,
Cutting the tropic line of Capricorn,
I conquered all as far as Zanzibar.
Then by the northern part of Africa,
I came at last to Græcia, and from thence
To Asia, where I stay against my will : —
Which is, from Scythia where I first began,
Backwards and forwards, near five thousand leagues.
Look here, my boys ; see what a world of ground
Lies westward from the midst of Cancer’s line
Unto the rising of this earthly globe ;
Whereas the sun, declining from our sight,
Begins the day with our Antipodes !
And shall I die, and this unconquer’d ?
Lo, here, my sons, are all the golden mines,

Inestimable drugs and precious stones,
More worth than Asia and the world beside;
And from the Antarctic Pole eastward behold
As much more land, which never was descried,
Wherein are rocks of pearl that shine as bright
As all the lamps that beautify the sky!
And shall I die, and this unconquerèd?"

In this passage we are in the world that Columbus and the great voyagers discovered, and breathe its air as fresh as in those Elizabethan mornings when the wonder was still on it.

In "The Jew of Malta" Marlowe selected the second primary passion of man, the lust for gold, and he made Barabas a type of the love of wealth, as prodigal as was Tamburlaine of the love of empire. He it was from whose lips dropped the line

"Infinite riches in a little room,"

and illustrated it by that glittering hoard which shows in fewest words the lavishness that is a constant trait of Marlowe: —

"Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts,
Jacinths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds,
Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,
And seld-seen costly stones of so great price

As one of them indifferently rated . . .
May serve in peril of calamity
To ransom great kings from captivity."

The passion of the Jew, like that of the conqueror, is single and alone. Marlowe desired a more unlimited play for the soul's infinite capacity, and in "Doctor Faustus" he showed that multiple thirst, which was the very image of the Renaissance, that thirst to exhaust all natures by possessing them, which only the secrets of magic could satisfy and allay, but which was a passion so deep-seated that the scholar would barter his soul in exchange for that means of power. At this price Faustus obtained the satisfaction of every wish and was as supreme in this empire of the mind as Tamburlaine had been in the kingdoms of the world.

Infinite empire, infinite riches, infinite satisfaction of desire, are thus the three great themes of Marlowe, in these most characteristic plays; the desire, the passion, and the power of life on a grand scale filled his mind, and gave his imagination that grandiloquence which is the trait by which he is most eminent in men's memories. He had thus discovered

passion as the substance of the drama, and had created great embodiments of it in characters that remain types never to be forgotten of the passion he delineated in each. To put the fact in a different way, he was the first great psychologist in English drama; he created psychology in it as a dramatic theme. He conceived these primary passions somewhat simply and abstractly, elementally; but in these plays he had already begun to find the counterfoil to passion, which is the other half of dramatic art, namely, the event; and as he went on in his art, and grasped the interplay of passion and circumstance which makes tragedy whole and complete as an image of human life, he guided the art into its proper element, history. That was his second great achievement as a fashioner of the drama in his day. In the earlier plays he had given passion its career in an ideal world; in "Edward II" he seized upon it in its confining bounds of history, and his work at once gained complexity and reality, or what is called probability; it became lifelike. It must be acknowledged that there is more

vitality in "Edward II" than in Shakspeare's more expert development of the same theme in "Richard II." Richard suffers in his imagination, in his kingship, in his idea of himself; but Edward suffers in his heart, and is in all ways warmer, tenderer, more manly. It was by this resort to history as the element of human drama that Marlowe obtained this vitality in the characters and actuality in the events; and by his example he put into Shakspeare's hands his prentice work in the historical plays, as he had already directed his interest to the psychology of the human spirit and the career of great passions in exalted types of the imagination. Marlowe was in these ways the forerunner, not only of Shakspeare, but of the dramatic age.

Marlowe performed another service, not only for the drama, but for English literature, and one that is forever associated with his name. He gave to English poetry its best instrument of expression, — blank verse. It is true that blank verse had been used before and upon the stage; but it was Marlowe's distinction to develop the melody and rheto-

ric of blank verse, to give it eloquence, ardor, and passion, to make it throb and live; and from him, again, Shakspeare took it and through successive years molded and shaped it, made it flexible and plastic, till it became the most vital form of English speech. In Marlowe the line is still in its elementary stage; its value is there, but its value is often too exclusively a monotone and too frequently merely sonorous; the repetition is tedious, the sound is swelling and bombastic; on the other hand, it should be remembered that this sounding and gorgeous oratory, together with the eloquence and rhetoric, the excess of rich detail, the picturesqueness and ornament, the lavish fancy, all taken in one, was a means of securing that illusion of the imagination of which the bare and ill-furnished scenic stage of Elizabeth stood so greatly in need. In a certain way this ranting and profuse language was a substitute for scenery, and helped to give the necessary elevation to the mimic stage. In his employment of blank verse, too, Marlowe showed the same rapid progress in the power of his art that distinguished him in charac-

terization and in plot; and as he became accustomed to the measure, he dissolved its original monotone, broke it up into true melody, while at the same time he gathered temperance and kept nearer to the natural language of high passion, as in the great scenes of "Edward II" and of "Doctor Faustus." In all this, as in the rest of his art, he was a bold experimenter and learned by doing; but just as there was a gift of nature which underlay his sympathy with great passions, that Dionysiac dæmonic force within himself, so there was a gift of nature beneath his "mighty line." Style, the power and the feeling for noble language, was born in him; that *aliquid immensum infinitumque* that Cicero desired in the orator was innate in Marlowe; it was not merely the large words and rolling cadences upon his lips, but throughout the poet's make there was the sense and feeling of the infinite, seen at the lowest in the profusion of his fancy, and at the highest in the reach of his imagination in his great tragic scenes, but most apparent and condensed perhaps in that passage on poetic expression which no lover of Mar-

lowe can forbear to quote, though it be familiar:—

“If all the pens that ever poets held
Had fed the feeling of their masters’ thoughts,
And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,
Their minds, and muses on admirèd themes;
If all the heavenly quintessence they still
From their immortal flowers of poesy
Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive
The highest reaches of a human wit:—
If these had made one poem’s period,
And all combined in beauty’s worthiness,
Yet should there hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
Which into words no virtue can digest.”

The feeling of the inexpressible, which is in literature the sense of the infinite, was never told with more heart-felt conviction than in these lines. The style of Marlowe, as lofty as it is rich, where every line brims to the rim with melody or beauty or high feeling, is such as belongs to the man. It was Shakspeare’s best fortune that he caught the golden cadence of his youth from such a master’s lips.

Marlowe died at the age of thirty, and left this memory of himself which for splendor

and beauty is fitly symbolized by the image of the morning star which has been so freely applied to him. It is not because of the perfection of his works that he is remembered; he left no single work of the first rank; a developed art is the prerequisite of great literature. He did not so much create great works as he rather originated the art itself by which great works should in their time be accomplished. I have indicated the specific service he thus rendered by concentrating the drama on passion, by sending it to history to school, and by giving it the instrument of blank verse; but I have not meant thereby to trace his historical significance, but to show forth more fully the strength that was in him, the immense poetic energy of which his genius was the phenomenon. He had the warmth and susceptibility of a youthful poet, but he had also a greatness of soul which we associate with more manly years. He was an emanation of the Renaissance, one of that new brood of men which was like a new creation in the ranks of the angels of power. He was a forward-looking spirit; no fibre in him

looked backward to the past; he was revolutionary. He was full of mastership; no part of his nature went in leash to any power in heaven or on earth; he was free. He was lawless, even, as it is the lot of genius to be because of the prophetic element in it by which it belongs to a world not yet come into being. More than any of his fellows, more even than Shakspeare to me, he seems self-absorbed in his own other world of imaginative art, and living there as in his own bright, particular star. He is the very type of genius, as I have said, — the naked form of it, — as bright, as beautiful, as neglectful of mankind, as free from any regards of earth as an antique statue that gives to our eyes the mortal aspect of a god.

III

CAMOENS

CAMOENS, the maker of the only truly modern epic, offers an illustration of poetic power which is to me one of the most interesting, although the foreignness of his subject-matter and the extraordinary lameness of its English translations make difficult obstacles to our appreciation; but for that very reason he has the happiest fortune that can fall to a poet in the fact that familiarity ever endears him the more. He is a less pure type of the flame of genius than Marlowe; poetic energy appears in him less a spiritual power dwelling in its own realm of imagination; but, on the other hand, his career admits us to a nearer view of a poet's human life, to what actually befalls the man so doubtfully endowed with that inward passion of life, in the days and weeks and years of his journey. Scarce any poet is so autobiographical in the strict sense. Others

have made themselves the subject of their song; but usually, like Shelley, they exhibit an ideal self seen under imaginative lights and through the soul's atmosphere, and in these self-portraits half the lines are aspiration realized, the self they dream of; but Camoens shows in his verse as he was in life, with a naturalness and vigor, with an unconscious realism, a directness, an intensity and openness that give him to us as a comrade.

He was of the old blue blood of the Peninsula, the Gothic blood, the same that gave birth to Cervantes. He was blond, and bright-haired, with blue eyes, large and lively, the face oval and ruddy, — and in manhood the beard short and rounded, with long untrimmed mustachios, — the forehead high, the nose aquiline; in figure agile and robust; in action “quick to draw and slow to sheathe,” and when he was young, he writes that he had seen the heels of many, but none had seen his heels. Born about the year 1524, of a noble and well-connected family, educated at Coimbra, a university famous for the classics, and launched in life about

the court at Lisbon, he was no sooner his own master than he fell into troubles. He was a lover born, and the name of his lady, Caterina, is the first that emerges in his life; for such Romeo-daring he was banished from court when he was about twenty, whether after a duel or a stolen interview is uncertain; and on his return, since he continued faithful to his lady, he was sent into Africa, and in an engagement with pirates in the Straits of Gibraltar he lost his right eye. He fought the Moors for three years until he was twenty-five, and returning to Lisbon, enlisted for the Indies; but in consequence of a street affair with swords in which he drew in defence of some masked ladies and unfortunately wounded a palace servant, he was held in prison three years. Eleven days after his release he sailed, and it is not unlikely that his sailing was a condition of his release. He rounded the Cape of Good Hope and came to India, where he served in campaigns and garrison, and occasionally held official appointments, and from time to time fell into prison. He cleared himself from all charges of wrong-

doing in office; but he was of the type that makes both enemies and friends. He was outspoken, and he indulged his mood in satire, a dangerous employment in the narrowness of colonial and army life. On the other hand, he was a brave and gentle comrade and delighted in manly traits; and so there was a round of companions in arms to whom he was dear. He served far and wide, fought on the coasts of the Red Sea, wintered in Ormuz in the Persian Gulf, spent some years in China, and seems to have visited the Malay islands; once he was shipwrecked on the Chinese coast. It is clear that he roamed the Orient on all the lines of travel and enterprise, of commerce and war, wherever the Portuguese ships could sail, and bore throughout the name and character of a gentleman-adventurer of that world, a daring, enterprising, hopeful, unfortunate, and often distressed man.

Sixteen years of his manhood passed in these toils, —

“In one hand aye the Sword, in one the Pen,”
— along the tropical seas and under the alien skies; for from the first, even before

in his youth he planted a lance in Africa, he had held to his breast that little manuscript book where year by year, on the deck and the gun-breech, in his grotto at Macao, in prison, wherever he might be and under whatever aspect of fortune, he wrote down the growing lines of that poem which is now the chief glory of his native land. When he was shipwrecked in China, he lost the little store of gold that he had accumulated in the office which he was recalled from, but he held safe this book, —

“In his embrace the song that swam to land
From sad and piteous shipwreck dripping wet
’Scaped from the reefs and rocks that fang the
strand.”

Now, after sixteen years, nostalgia, not simple homesickness, but the nostalgia of him who fares forth into the world and voyages long in stranger-lands, had fallen on him, and was heavy in all his spirit. He had left Portugal, indignantly saying that his country should not possess his bones; but he had long changed this temper, —

“Tagus yet pealeth with the passion caught
From the wild cry he flung across the sea”; —

all his hopes had really rested on the honor of the song he had built up for the glory of Portugal, and while everything else that men name success faded away and escaped him, with this poem surely he would find welcome home. He stopped at Mozambique with the captain-governor, and when he wished to continue his voyage, this officer, who was his host, consigned him to prison for a debt due himself, a small sum. Soon afterwards, however, a ship came by, with a dozen of Camoens' old messmates and friends, veterans, and they contributed the money for his release. So, says the old biographer, "were simultaneously sold the person of Camoens and the honor of Pedro Barreto" for £25. With these friends Camoens sailed homeward, and arrived safely, but not to find prosperity. It was three years before his book was published; and he received for reward only a pension of about one hundred dollars in our money at its present worth, and this was not often paid. The entire eight years of his life at Lisbon were filled with such poverty and distress as we remember of the last dying days of Spenser

and Chatterton. He lived some part of this time in a religious house, that is, an alms-house; at other times his Javanese servant, who had stayed with him, begged food for him at night, but the faithful servant died before his wretched master. Even among the poets few have been so homeless and destitute as Camoens in his life's end, now going about on crutches and suffering the last sad effects of a hard-faring life. It was the moment just before his death when the power of Portugal was extinguished on the battle-field by Philip of Spain: "I die," he wrote to a friend, "not only in my country, but with it." The time of his death is uncertain, but he was about fifty-five years old. He died in a hospital. "I saw him die," says an old Carmelite brother, "in the hospital of Lisbon, without a sheet wherewith to cover himself." Such in its external events was the life-story of Camoens.

If one throws upon this harsh narrative the light that flows from Camoens' poetry, the lines are softened in the retrospect; the hardship and misfortune are seen in that atmosphere of melancholy that pervades his

strong verse and blends with it, as tenderness companions valor in the man himself. To see properly the phases of his genius, one should glance first at the lyrical works, and especially the sonnets, that preceded and accompanied the heroic verse of the epic. From his student days at the university, unlike Marlowe, he was the heir of a developed art, and in all his work is seen the fair background of the poetic tradition, — in the epic the forms of old mythology, and in the lyrics the Italian example of Petrarch. To him his lady Caterina was what Petrarch's Laura had been, an ideal of hopeless and pure passion. Her personality is not definitely known, but she married and died while still young. Though in his sonnets to her Camoens followed the poetic tradition, the reality of his devotion cannot be doubted in its inception; and in its continuance through the years of his youth, and especially of his long exile in the Orient, this ideal passion stood for him, at least, as the sign and certainty of his first failure — his failure in love. It became, perhaps, after long and hopeless years simply the cry of his imagi-

nation, but it had its original being in the call of the heart. Very sweet and noble, though conventional, is his early pleading: —

“Beautiful eyes, whereof the sunny sphere
When most with cloudless clarity of light
The infinite expanse he maketh bright,
Doubting to be eclipsed, doth stand in fear:
If I am held in scorn who hold you dear,
Then, having of all things such perfect sight,
Consider this thing too, that mortal night
To cover up your beauty draweth near.
Gather, O gather with unstaying hand,
The fruits that must together gathered be,
Occasion ripe, and Passion’s clasp divine.
And, since by you I live and die, command
Love, that he yield his tribute unto me,
Who unto you have freely yielded mine.”

After years of vain castle-building during which he seemed his “own sorrow’s architect,” and in that wide roaming which he describes, —

“Now scattering my music as I pass,
The world I range, —

he still kept true to the lover’s creed: —

“All evils Love can wreak behold in me,
In whom the utmost of his power malign
He willed unto the world to manifest:

But I, like him, would have these things to be.
Lifted by woe to ecstasy divine,
I would not change for all the world possess.

When his lady died, he lifted his prayer in his loveliest and most famous sonnet:—

“Soul of my soul, that didst so early wing
From our poor world thou heldest in disdain,
Bound be I ever to my mortal pain,
So thou hast peace before the Eternal King!
If to the realms where thou dost soar and sing
Remembrance of aught earthly may attain,
Forget not the deep love thou did'st so fain
Discover my fond eyes inhabiting.
And if my yearning heart unsatisfied,
And pang on earth incurable have might
To profit thee and me, pour multiplied
Thy meek entreaties to the Lord of Light,
That swiftly He would raise me to thy side,
As suddenly He rapt thee from my sight.”

In these sonnets and other lyrical poems the poet is hardly more personal than in the heroic epic, but his personality is more exclusively felt, and the topics are not confined to his love. The most lasting impression made is of the passing of hope out of his life. Camoens was one of those souls who are great in hope; and he often

bent upon the past reverted eyes, and drew the sum of his losses, ending in that refrain —

“For Death and Disenchantment all was made —
Woe unto all that hope! to all that trust!”

The vein of melancholy in the lyrical poems opens the tenderness of Camoens, and perhaps the softer note is somewhat overcharged in these admirable but rather Italianated versions of Dr. Garnett's that I have used; life-weariness and profound discouragement, indeed, there is in them; but they are not the simple outflow of a Petrarchan lover's complaint, but the sorrows of a much-toiling man; for Camoens was both sailor and soldier, and as natural to those ways of labor as to the handling of the lute. The voyage, the march, and the battle made up the larger part of his life.

This opens the second trait to be observed in the phases of his development, namely, his absorption of the patriotic vitality of his country. It is true that he inherited a developed and conventionalized art, and had always that fair background of classical

figures and Italian atmosphere which were his portion of the Renaissance; but the Renaissance was rather like a little mountain city where he was born and drank his youth; he did not abide there, but came down into the great modern world that was then to be, — the world of the waste of waters and the spreading empires. Portugal played a great part in that age which broke the horizon bars and passed the western and the eastern limit of the sun alike, and made the fleets as free of the ocean as the sea-birds of every wandering wave. Camoens was to make this the great theme of his song, — the ocean fame of Portugal. But he was inducted into his passion of patriotism by natural ways, before the glory of the ocean discoveries was fully opened in his mind. Portugal, you remember, was the child of battle, born of the conflict of the Christian and the Moor; on the stricken field she found her crown itself, and became a state: and in maintaining the struggle that drove the Crescent back into Africa, and in following across the straits to free the seaboard, she developed her strength, laid up her most heroic memo-

ries, and built those navies that were to open and command so many seas.

When Camoens in his youth fought his first campaigns in Africa, he was united with his country's cause and honor in its great historic current, and it was by nature that there flamed up in him that national pride, hating and triumphing over the Moor, which is the historic substance of his epic. He had found his theme in battling with the Moorish power. The realization of this theme, the patriotic past of his country, was the second phase of his development. Then came, with his long and perilous voyage and his years of wanderings through all the picturesque coasts of the East, that expansion and enrichment of his theme which reduced the original Moorish battle to the rank of episode and background, while the maritime greatness of Portugal, set forth in the story of the voyage of Da Gama round the Cape of Good Hope as the main action, became the more prominent subject. The poem itself yields these three main elements corresponding to the division that has been made: the background of classical mythology, which affords the mechanism of

the plot, and is of the Renaissance; the history of Portugal which affords the time perspectives and the main episodes; and lastly the fortunes of Da Gama. The poem thus grew with Camoens' own growth, and contains his artistic training in the school of Renaissance tradition, his youthful African marches and raids, and his manhood voyages. He made it embrace the whole glory of Portugal, compressed into its stanzas all her romance, heroism, and fable from the earliest record in antique days to his own hour, spread in it the naval dominion of her great contemporary age; and he did this, not as a reminiscent scholar in Virgil's way or Tasso's way, but as one who had labored in the glorious action by sea and land, near the port and far in the open, boy and man, with sword and pen. The enthusiasm of a lifetime here gathers and gives out the passion of a whole nation and makes a people's glory one with the poet's fame. The "Lusiads" is the principal monument of Portugal, and the chief national bond that binds her children in one.

It is this infusion of personality — and

personality like Marlowe's of the daring Renaissance type — which makes the "Lusiads" so different from all other epics. The theme is not presented as an ideal action in remote time after the manner of other poets, but seems a real event, something that the poet had done and been. It is as if Ulysses had written the "Odyssey." Camoens was himself, like Ulysses, such a traveller, a romantic wanderer, a hard-toiling man, in the heroic exile of enterprise on the sea-edges of a larger and unknown world. It is this temperament of the wanderer that so endears him to all nomad souls. It is this which made him attractive to Captain Burton, for example, who made the labor of translating his works a part of his task for twenty years; and though it is marvellously unreadable, it is from this translation that I shall quote; for at times, and not seldom, he catches the spirit of Camoens as the sail catches the wind. The "Lusiads" is a sea-poem. No poem approaches it in maritime quality except the "Odyssey." The note of the whole is struck in Da Gama's account of the setting sail of the fleet from Lisbon: —

“We from the well-known port went sorrowing,
After the manner of far-faring men.”

The fleet made out to sea, and this is the
parting view: —

“Slow, ever slower, banisht from our eyne,
Vanisht our native hills, astern remaining;
Remained dear Tagus, and the breezy line
Of Cintran peaks, long, long, our gaze detaining;
Remainèd eke in that dear country mine
Our hearts, with pangs of memory ever paining;
Till, when all veiled sank in darkling air,
Naught but the welkin and the wave was there.”

The sense not only of the deep sea, as in this last line, but of the undiscovered, is constantly present, — not only the illimitable waste of waters, but the peril of them. It is a growing peril, vaguely felt at first beside the new islands and capes lately discovered, in the strangeness of the coasts by which the ships drop southward, in the adventures with the unfamiliar tribes at the landfalls; but the strangeness becomes peril, slowly and surely, — that panic fear which is not for a moment of alarm but for days and nights of increasing dread — the mood which all great explorers have known, from Columbus to the latest, who

have had to master their men with the desperate force of a higher courage and hold them to the onward course. It is this gigantic fear, rising from the endless rolling of the sea and driving of the cloudy winds in the pathless ways of the lonely sail, — it is this fear that Camoens gives body and a name in the most daring and perhaps the most celebrated of the inventions of his fancy, — the apparition of the giant phantom, Adamastor, off the Cape of Good Hope. Adamastor symbolizes the dangers of the ocean enterprise and the revenge of the elements outraged by the human victory over their brute power.

What Camoens there renders by imagination and allegory he draws again realistically in the account of the storm in the Indian Ocean. The storm in Shakspeare's "Tempest" is the only sea-storm that compares with it for majesty and violence, and at the same time for truth to sea-weather. The little picture of the night-watch on deck with which the scene opens gives perhaps in briefest space that unaffected naturalism which distinguishes Camoens' descriptions of actuality: —

“All half-numbed and chill
Shivered with many a yawn the huddling crew
Beneath the bulging mainsail, clothed ill
To bear the nightly breath that keenly blew ;
Their eyes kept open sore against their will
They rubbed and stretched their torpid limbs anew,” —
and to keep awake they begin to spin yarns ; in
this case the fine chivalric tale of the Twelve of
England — in the course of which the storm
breaks on them with tropic suddenness.

The labor of the life is thus a main element
in the poem, which is solid with experience
and sombre with it, also. Camoens de-
lighted in his companions, those vassals of the
king, “peerless in their worth,” but it is the
darker side of their lives that holds his imagi-
nation and memory alike : —

“Look how they gladly wend by many a way : —
Self-doomed to sleepless night and foodless day,
To fire and steel, shaft-shower, and bullet-flight ;
To torrid Tropics, Arctics froze and gray,
The Pagan’s buffet and the Moor’s despite ;
To risks invisible, threatening human life,
To wreck, sea-monsters and the wave’s wild strife.”

The lonely death in a foreign land, always
near in the prospect, imparts a deep melan-
choly to the verse, that true epic melancholy,

which Virgil summed in that one of his most immortal lines where the dying soldier "remembers sweet Argos." Camoens was a man of friendships, of that comradeship which flowers only in such hardy soil, and many of his verses lament the untimely death of the brave heart in its youth. One sonnet on the death of a comrade in Africa, in the form of an epitaph spoken by the victim, best tells the story:—

" Few years and evil to my life more lent,
All with hard toil and misery replete:
Light did so swiftly from my eyes retreat,
That ere five lustres quite were gone, I went.
Ocean I roamed and isle and continent,
Seeking some remedy for life unsweet;
But he whom Fortune will not frankly meet,
Vainly by venture woos her to his bent.
First saw I light in Lusitanian land,
Where Alemquer the blooming nurtured me;
But, feeble foul contagion to withstand,
I feed the fish's maw where thou, rude sea,
Lashest the churlish Abyssinian strand,
Far from my Portugal's felicity."

The same mood, in the "Lusiads," fills the stanza which he dedicates to the memory of all who fell by the wave and along the trail:—

“ At last in tangled brake and unknown ground
Our true companions lost for aye we leave,
Who mid such weary ways, such dreary round,
Such dread adventures, aidance ever gave.
How easy for man’s bones a grave is found !
Earth’s any wrinkle, ocean’s any wave,
Whereso the long home be, abroad, at home,
For every hero’s corse may lend a tomb.”

Camoens is always directly faithful to the daily and hourly life, to the physical scene and the human manners; but his truth to the heroic spirit, the martial breath that filled the sails of the great enterprise, and also his truth to the sentiment of the wanderer, the power whereby he renders the melancholy which falls from the dry and sterile Arabian peaks of rose-red rock, diffusing that nostalgia of the brave heart, heightening all that bravery so, and thereby renews for us, and illumines, that old type of the “much-enduring” man,—all this constitutes a truth for which reality seems but a faint and shadowy name. It is the truth not merely of a voyage, but of man’s life on earth,—such as it is when poetry presents it most nobly, most feelingly, and without a veil. To Camoëns the fortune of human life showed no

smiling face; it was not in fortune but in character that he found life's value. He was a lover of heroic men, those

“By the doughty arm and sword that chase
Honor which man may proudly hail his own;
In weary vigil, in the steely case,
'Mid wrathsome winds and bitter billows thrown,
Suff'ring the frigid rigors in th' embrace
Of South, and regions lorn, and lere, and lone;
Swallowing the tainted rations' scanty dole,
Salted with toil of body, moil of soul.”

The character of Da Gama is very nobly drawn; he is all that such a leader should be; a figure worthy of his place in the poem, and of the fame to which he is exalted, akin to Æneas before him and to Tasso's Godfrey who was born after him. Camoens' morality, his conception of the character of “a good king, a great captain, a wise councillor, a just judge, a pure priest,” as Burton draws the catalogue, is always energetic and lofty. Of all his personal qualities he is most proud of his own independence in judgment, his honesty of speech, his perfect and entire fearlessness. He returns repeatedly to this claim of truth-telling, which he thought was

his duty as a part of his fidelity to the Muses; and when he invokes their aid, he makes this his main plea: —

“Aid me you only: — long indeed sware I
No grace to grant where good doth not prevail,
And none to flatter, whatso their degrees
On pain of losing all my power to please.”

In telling the story of Portugal, past and present, he had much occasion to use this high ideal; not even in those days did he hesitate to denounce and inveigh within the pale of the Church itself. Morality, in the high sense of character, pervades the poem; virtue, in the ancient and manly meaning of the word, — the old epic “arms and the man,” — is its substance, and charm is diffused over it as in the “Æneid.” This charm partly arises from that oriental coloring — the *lux ex Oriente* — natural to the scene, in the detail of which, Burton says, Camoens rarely trips, being more accurate than most modern authors, and that experienced traveller wonders at the quality of the brain that amassed so much information from sources so few and so imperfect. The charm, however, lies also in the contrast between the

realism of the matter and the fantastic power of Camoens' imagination, which is one of his most powerful and fascinating traits and peculiarly a feature of his originality. The Adamastor episode serves as an example; but a nobler one is the ideal figuring of the rivers Indus and Ganges, who appear like Neptunian forms in the dream of the old king which was one of the motives of the voyage. The variation by which the scenes of pictured history — a tradition of the epic and seen by Æneas, you remember, at Carthage — are here found spread on the banners of the festally decorated Portuguese ships is a happy play of the poet's fancy. The isle of Venus, that receives the homeward-bound fleet, is perhaps the most surprising, as it is certainly the loveliest, of these imaginative fantasies. But it is not by any piecemeal criticism and naming of passages that the quality of this epic can be conveyed.

Yet one must add still another of its larger elements, namely, its spaciousness. I mean the map of the world, like that map I read from "Tamburlaine," that it unfolds. Camoens describes the European quarter early in the

poem, beginning from Russia and sweeping southward and west, leaving England entirely out as if it were Iceland of to-day, and finding, of course, in the little state of Portugal the climax and summit of the world. It is a perspective to which our thoughts are unused, but in its day was not an untrue one; and for us to have it in mind — to emigrate into it, as it were — is a prerequisite to the appreciation of the “*Lusiads*,” for such was Camoens’ world. He also describes the voyaging of the fleet with great detail. But it is in the last book of the poem that the face of the new earth is shown, magically in the mystic globe of the planetary sphere, to Da Gama by the Siren: that new earth, fresh as it then arose from the uncovered waters, — the Asian seas and continent and islands, the African coasts and uplands, and the unknown west far as through Magellan’s Straits; it is a wide reach, a finer vision than Milton gave from the specular mount, and with it as in its own horizons the epic ends.

The “*Lusiads*” is the only truly modern epic, but one seems to breathe in it the early air of the “*Odyssey*” and “*Iliad*” more than

in any intervening poem; like the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," it has no love element in its plot, but the old heroic life—man's life of the oar-blade and the battle-field—rules the scene. The sense of primitive life, however, is still deeper-seated, in its neighborhood to nature, where the sky is the tent of the bivouac and the roof of the deck-watch, and man is a solitary figure in the landscape, and life a hand-to-hand affair. Into that far alien field of earth and waters the pride of Portugal is carried, as it were, on the banners of a little squadron conquering a mighty world. It was fitting in the Peninsular war that the regiments of Portugal went into battle with lines of Camoens inscribed upon their flags. Yet it is a narrow view that would see in the "Lusiads" only the self-glorification of a little state. It has a larger significance. The blending of the East and West at a great dawn^m of history is here rendered in a noble form of human greatness, cast in the lives of a few brave men equal to great tasks.

Such are a few of the traits of this epic. But what a fiery soul must that have been

which could carry such a passion of poetry through the years of exile and ever cherish it as a life above life itself! The deep melancholy of Camoens, as it gathered in later years, is plain; his failure in love — the hunger of the heart that was never to be appeased with any earthly touch of the ideal — was but the sign of the famine that fell upon him in all the ways of success. He had no talent for success. He was filled with poet's blood, as the pure grape with wine. He was wild and free, amorous, framed for enjoyment, Southern-hearted, a boon comrade, a tender friend; between the prison and the camp and the ship's deck he had a soldier's gayety, was fond of fine apparel and of golden suppers, — the adventurer's changeful fortune; but failure was all he found in the East, and the profound discouragement of his lot invaded his heart at last. He reviewed his life in one of his last sonnets.

“In lowly cell, bereaved of liberty,
Error's meet recompense, long time I spent;
Then o'er the world disconsolate I went,
Bearing the broken chain that left me free;
My life I gave unto this memory;
No lesser sacrifice would Love content;

And poverty I bore and banishment ;
So it was ordered, so it had to be.
Content with little, though I knew indeed
Content unworthy, yet, aloof from strife,
I loved to mark Man's various employ.
But my disastrous star, whom now I read,
Blindness of death, and doubtfulness of life,
Have made me tremble when I see a joy."

The passing of hope out of his life was the history of his soul. He came home only to make disaster sure, as the event proved. Sick, old with wounds, the almshouse gave him to the hospital, and the hospital to the grave, as a corpse is cast from wave to wave till it sinks into a nameless tomb. It seems — it is — pitiful.

"Woe unto all that hope! to all that trust!" —

it is the epitaph of most of the poets. Yet it is from the consuming flame of such a passion and power of life as burnt in this much-enduring soul that poetic genius gives out its immortal star.

IV

BYRON

It is an error to think of Byron as an English poet; he was expatriated not only in his person but in his genius; and this partly accounts for the fact that his reputation so soon became, and still remains, Continental. He was not a poet of what was always, for him, the dismal island of his birth. He was rather a poet of the Mediterranean world. There he found the main material of his works, — the motive, the stage, the incidents, and the inspiration, — the picturesque and romantic scene of his imagination, ranging from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Golden Horn. He stamped his memory there — still felt — from Calpe to Stamboul. Portugal and Spain, Albania and Greece were his earliest topics in verse after his boyish preluding was done; Italy

was the main theme of his most majestic manhood poetry; and by a nearer and internal tie the Italian literary tradition entered into his genius and characterized his style. England need not have troubled to refuse him so often and so long a niche in the Abbey; for wherever his bones may lie or tablets of grateful honor be erected, Greece is the true shrine of his memory, and will always be so. In all things that pertain to the immortal part of him, he thus belongs to the Mediterranean; and it is only in the perspective of those broken coasts, in the purple of those lonely islands, in the high atmosphere of those snow-clad and thronging peaks that his genius is seen as in its home.

He was but a youth and in the first flush of his poetic blood, when the Mediterranean revelation came to him, on his first voyage. He entered the south by Lisbon. The moment was a true awakening; and so natural that he was not aware the poet was born in him; and later he was still clinging to his adolescent and apprentice work — such as the “Hints from Horace” — for the hope of

reputation, when by the publication of these first Mediterranean moods, he “awoke and found himself famous.” But his fame was not more sudden than the awakening had been. He responded at once to that disclosure of the Mediterranean beauty, which is a romantic marvel to all Northern eyes;

“Ah me, — what hand can pencil guide or pen
To follow half on which the eye dilates?”

and one feels his new throb of life in the mere amplitude of description that overflows even from the earliest stanzas: —

“The horrid crags by toppling convent crowned;
The cork-trees hoar that clothe the shaggy steep;
The mountain-moss by scorching skies embrowned;
The sunken glen whose sunless shrubs must weep;
The tender azure of the unruffled deep,
The orange fruits that gild the greenest bough,
The torrents that from cliff to valley leap,
The vine on high, the willow branch below,
Mixt in one mighty scene.”

Byron had the poet's temperament, full and strong, — the peril in his blood, the wildness of impulse, the lawless will, the passion of life. He was fresh from his first angers with life, and had gone out from

England seeking an escape, — some air of freer breath, some horizon to wander in. It was now that the love of the ocean was confirmed in him; for in his experience it was a love of Mediterranean waves. It was from them, as he sailed onward, that the Corsair's song was caught: —

“O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea,
Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free,
Far as the breeze can bear, the billows foam,
Survey our empire, and behold our home!”

It was a great adventure for this youth of twenty years — such a voyage into the Levant. It was a free life, — such freedom as he had never known, — and it was romantic in its scene and human incident, its mingling with more primitive men of strange aspect and rough hardihood, its combined naturalness and foreignness. He never forgot its pictures; and he drew one for all in that passage of “The Dream” which describes in brief these wanderings: —

“In the wilds
Of fiery climes he made himself a home,
And his soul drank their sunbeams; he was girt
With strange and dusky aspects; he was not

Himself like what he had been ; on the sea
And on the shore he was a wanderer ;
There was a mass of many images
Crowded like waves upon me, but he was
A part of all ; and in the last he lay
Reposing from the noontide sultriness,
Couched among fallen columns, in the shade
Of ruined walls that had survived the names
Of those who reared them ; by his sleeping side
Stood camels grazing, and some goodly steeds
Were fastened near a fountain ; and a man
Clad in a flowing garb did watch the while
While many of his tribe slumbered around ;
And they were canopied by the blue sky,
So cloudless, clear, and purely beautiful,
That God alone was to be seen in heaven."

This admirably composed oriental scene may stand for the circumstance and atmosphere of this voyage as Byron himself remembered it, but it needs to be supplemented by the more stirring scenes, such as his reception by the Suliotes when the weather forced him and his crew to land on that doubtful coast: —

"Vain fear ! The Suliotes stretched the welcome hand,
Led them o'er rocks, and past the dangerous swamp,
And piled the hearth, and wrung their garments damp,
And filled the bowl, and trimmed the cheerful lamp,
And spread their fare — though homely, all they had."

Through such contact with nature, with the picturesque and primitive, with wild and savage or broad and solitary scenes, Byron's imagination first took on its romantic color; and the free life he led in the open, on the sea and in camp, loosed in him that spirit of adventure which in his verse took the cast of desperate love and pirate warfare, — the passion and brigandage of the Levantine East. They were almost natural elements in that environment; and in idealizing them the ardors of his own young temperament found an imaginative form. ¶ Byron never again lived so fully and keenly, either imaginatively or in the merely physical sense, as in this early year of his Mediterranean roving. He was not a natural wanderer, a born traveller, like Camoens. He never heard the call of the wilderness nor obeyed the *Wander-lust*. This voyage was only such a one as any young Englishmen might take for pleasure, for sport. Nevertheless, to him, being a poet, it constituted his awakening, and stirred and freed him, and gave his genius wing. It remained his deepest poetic experience and the happiest memory

of his dying past, with its "rosy floods of twilight's sky"; its latest recollections, after many years, gave, in "Don Juan," the loveliest scenes of all his verse; and he was conscious of the debt: —

"Ave Maria! bless'd be the hour!

The time, the clime, the spot, where I so oft
Have felt that moment in its fullest power
Sink o'er the earth, so beautiful and soft,
While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,
Or the faint, dying day-hymn stole aloft,
And not a breath crept through the rosy air,
And yet the forest leaves seemed stirred with prayer."

Byron in later years himself once wrote to Moore in a moment of discouragement that his poetical feelings began and ended with Eastern countries, and that having exhausted the subject, he could make nothing of any other. Certain it is that this year of adventurous travel unlocked the sources of his poetic power.[†]

The sudden burst of his genius under these favoring circumstances is, as you know, one of the wonders of literary fame. He had made three very simple prime discoveries. The first was of the romance of the Orient;

and his rendering of it in his tales is still its chief example in our literature. Moore, who cultivated the same field, was in this as in other things only Byron's satellite; and both he and Southey and the others who added the Arabian or Persian glamour to their works were mainly indebted to dictionaries, commentators, and travellers, whereas Byron took it from its native soil. However melodrama may enter into his tales, it would be an error not to recognize their realism, not only in their magnificent nature-coloring, but also in their manners, the accoutrement of their scenes, the play of their passions, — and especially in their truth to the sentiment of the land, —

“The land where the cypress and myrtle

Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime.”

Byron's genius, in a certain sense, was low-flying; he never liked to be far from matter of fact; and in that “bodiless creation” that the more ethereal, spiritualizing poets delight in, he was without faculty. He was little gifted with the power of invention, and beneath his verse is often found the substratum of the prose of others. Even

in these tales there is paraphrasing of Mrs. Radcliffe's novel, "The Bravo," for example; just as in his drama "Werner" there is another English novel, and in "The Island" and in the shipwreck of "Don Juan" there are versions of old voyages. Byron required that the scene should be given to him, a basis of matter of fact, — realism. It was his good fortune that, in assimilating the Orient, realism was given to him in a romantic form and on that superb landscape background, of which the description of the sunset over the Morea, seen from Acrocorinth, is perhaps the most familiar example. This coloring belongs to the characters as well, who are charged with passion and bravery; and the whole is in keeping with that tradition of violent adventure and sudden turns of fortune, which is the historic legend of the Mediterranean in the Moslem centuries. The tales, in fact, are nearer to the temper of Southern literature, long familiar with the Saracen and the Turk, than to our own. Their realism cannot but seem exotic in English, but to the traveller they recall the country of their origin with the vividness of

memory. For Byron's fame this discovery of the Levant was not unlike what the discovery of the Highlands had been for Scott, — a new world where fact itself was romance.

The second discovery of Byron was the sentiment of history in the landscape. It began in his classical devotion. He had been bred in school and college on Greek, and had that enthusiasm for the ancient past that was one of the great and fruitful traits of the old education. He had translated from many a Greek poet with schoolboy fervor. This voyage vivified his boyhood studies. Nothing is more genuine in his life than the emotion with which the actual presence of the sacred places of the old Greek land filled him.

“Oh, thou Parnassus ! whom I now survey,
Not in the frenzy of a dreamer's eye,
Not in the faded landscape of a lay,
But soaring snow-clad through thy native sky,
In the wild pomp of mountain majesty ! . . .

Oft have I dreamed of Thee ! whose glorious name
Who knows not, knows not man's divinest lore :
And now I view thee, 'tis, alas, with shame
That I in feeblest accents must adore.

When I recount thy worshippers of yore
I tremble, and can only bend the knee;
Nor raise my voice, nor vainly dare to soar,
But gaze beneath thy cloudy canopy
In silent joy to think at last I look on Thee!"

It was on the next day after composing these stanzas that he saw on Parnassus the flight of twelve eagles that he took as a happy omen of his poetic fame. The mood of these lines, the mere fact of this incident, testify to the sincerity of his feeling. It warmed his description of Greece, and gave that heroic blast to the lines with which again and again he strives to rouse the sleeping land. It was a feeling, moreover, destined to a rich development, and at last made him the characteristic type of the brooder over the buried past, — the poet of the desolation of human greatness. Here, again, the solid base of history, the natural cling of his mind to realism, to matter of fact, is noticeable. Under this mood of history poetry becomes meditative, in a deep sense, and broods upon human fate in its final issues; there grows up that feeling which Tennyson called "the passion of the past," and it interprets itself

and finds expression as an elegy of the nations. Byron became the great poet of this mood; it was born of his contact with the Mediterranean shores, and it took its touch of nobility especially from the classic stir of his emotions in Greece.

The third discovery in this year of travel was his practical enthusiasm for political liberty; or, if it be hardly just to ascribe to one group of circumstances the revolutionary force that played so great a part in his fame and was so deeply rooted in his nature, yet it was the actual sight of the servitude of Greece that precipitated and condensed and gave practical direction to his ardor. Every line of his enthusiasm for the Greece of old days goes coupled with a rousing cry to free the land; and great lines they are in which he strikes this tocsin of liberty, none now more famous: —

“Hereditary bondsmen, know ye not

Who would be free themselves must strike the blow!”

Indignation with the present sloth and ignominy is in constant struggle with his memory of the past and his feeling of virtue in the soil and of the beauty of the scene: —

“ Yet are thy skies as blue, thy crags as wild ;
Sweet are thy groves, and verdant are thy fields,
Thine olive ripe as when Minerva smiled,
And still his honeyed wealth Hymettus yields ;
There the blithe bee his fragrant fortress builds,
The free-born wanderer of thy mountain-air ;
Apollo still thy long, long summer gilds,
Still in his beam Mendeli’s marbles glare ;
And Glory, Freedom fail, but Nature still is fair.

“ Where e’er we tread ’tis haunted, holy ground ;
No earth of thine is lost in vulgar mould,
But one vast realm of wonder spreads around,
And all the Muse’s tales seem truly told,
Till the sense aches with gazing to behold
The scenes our earliest dreams have dwelt upon ;
Each hill and dale, each deepening glen and wold
Defies the power which crushed thy temples gone :
Age shakes Athena’s tower, but spares gray Marathon.”

The very name of the old battle-field is a reproach. It is in these stanzas, and others like them, that there is the prophecy of Missilonghi.

These three elements of the verse, the romance of the Orient, the sentiment of the past in the places of its decay, the call to arms against the Turk, are Mediterranean moods. Every traveller still recognizes them as dominant in his own experience, — the

picturesqueness, the desolation of old time, the hope. The sense of desolation is the most universal and profound, and in five lines Byron gave it expression that is true not of one place but on all the thousands of miles of those lonely and half-savage coasts:

“Approach you here!

Look on this spot — a nation’s sepulchre!

Abode of gods whose shrines no longer burn.

Even gods must yield — religions take their turn;

’Twas Jove’s; ’tis Mahomet’s; and other creeds

Will rise with other years, till man shall learn

Vainly his incense soars, his victim bleeds.”

Every traveller knows the mood, and there at least is apt to find it just. Outside of the circle of these three earlier motives, romance, meditation on the past, enfranchisement, the nobler genius of Byron, even in after years, hardly moved; nor did it rise to its height in other than Mediterranean air, except on the field of Waterloo and in the mountains of Switzerland.

In his later works he gave the first motive, romance, its most memorable expression in the loves of Juan and Haidée in scenes of unrivalled beauty, — the highest reach of

the romance of passion in English verse; the second motive, meditation, he developed most impressively and eloquently in the last book of "Childe Harold," making Italy his theme, in an elegy of genius and empire that is nowhere equalled; the third, freedom, found its climax not in poetry but in his death for Greece.

There is yet another element that sprang and strengthened in this year of travel, and is inextricably blended with the other three, — his initiation into the love of nature. Byron was not, as I have already said, a true rover; he was not only not a Camoens, — he was not even a Burton or a Borrow. He never again repeated this excursion, but was content to live within the pale of civilization. He was aristocratically bred, and necessarily a social person; in the fine stanzas on solitude, you remember, he found true solitude, not in nature but in crowds, that is, in the sense of isolation, and this marks him as essentially a social person; but once in his life he had approached the mood of the rover, and he describes the precise moment when he —

“felt himself at length alone,
And bade to Christian tongues a long adieu ;
Now he adventured on a shore unknown,
Which all admire, but many dread to view ;
His breast was armed 'gainst fate, his wants were few ;
Peril he sought not, but ne'er shrank to meet ;
The scene was savage, but the scene was new ;
This made the ceaseless toil of travel sweet,
Beat back keen winter's blast and welcomed summer's
heat.”

It is the picture of a young man with a horse, the mood of Kinglake, for example, in “Eothen.” But in this adventure he first touched hands with nature, and found by experience the bracing and reposing power that nature exercises on the social and aristocratic man bred in cities, — he found the relief which nature affords as a foil to life. He escaped from the conventional and entangling sphere of society, and reached unbounded freedom in the open. The scene appealed to him also as a poet; the extraordinary beauty of it, the majestic mountain ranges round the long purple gulfs, the mere clarity of the heavens were a revelation to his senses, and educated them, and through them entered into his spirit. There was

also an idiosyncrasy in his temperament, something grandiose in the man's soul which the greater scenes of nature developed and defined more consciously and gave a run of feeling; such scenes roused the physical electricity of his body, and made him sympathetic with the Alpine storm, the glacier peak, and the ocean gale. This deep power of nature so to stir him, and to exhaust itself in mere feeling, first fell on him with full seizure in the solitudes of the Greek coasts. It grew with his growth, but it was then dissociated from this early adventure and experience of the wild and the foreign. It became a power of pure sentiment. "To me," he says, "high mountains are a feeling." It was a more physical feeling than is found in his contemporaries; he did not idealize and transform and mythologize nature, like Shelley, or become pantheistic or religious in his thought of it or awe of it, like Wordsworth; among nature-poets — and he is one of the greatest of nature-poets — he remains in the dimly conscious and uninterpreted mood of men who in the presence of nature only see and feel. It was true of him in this early time, —

“Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends;
Where rolled the ocean, thereon was his home;
Where a blue sky, and glowing clime extends,
He had the passion and the power to roam;
The desert, forest, cavern, breaker’s foam,
Were unto him companionship; they spake
A mutual language.”

But after this first youthful year “the passion and the power to roam” was a figment of his ideal self, though he retained the secret of that “mutual language,” and wherever he found himself in his later little journeys from Geneva to Venice, from Ravenna to Pisa, he used this key.

It is apparent from what has been already brought forward that Byron unfolded his genius characteristically through phases of sentiment, romantically colored, of which the various elements show themselves clearly in the first-fruits of his Mediterranean experience, — the fourfold sentiment for the Levant, for the elegy of history, for the hopes of the Greeks, for the more majestic phenomena and the elemental force of nature. As he matured, he developed another sentiment, which was destined to swallow up all these, and, as it were, to fatten upon

them, and to become the memory of him that most deeply stamps his personality in the minds of men. I can only call it the sentiment of self. He was an egotist, as most of the poets have been; egotism is the secret of their strength as it is of the strength of all masters of the world, except, indeed, the few spiritually minded who dare to throw their lives away. He built up, as years went on, an ideal self; the analysis of its formation would be an interesting psychological study, for it was framed from many sources. It is but slightly to be discerned in the early cantos of "Childe Harold." It hardly became fixed in his own mind until after the troubles which led to his second and final flight from England into that self-exile which lasted till his death. He was one of those men who have something theatrical in their nature; he loved the centre of the stage; he liked effect. The circumstances of his life made it easy for him to hold attention; and also to adopt into his character an element of mystery, of which he knew the stage value; and he favored by his air and conduct the public

disposition to create in the background of his career something melodramatic; he let it be believed that in his own Mediterranean experience there had been the color of "The Corsair" and of "Lara," and that in the type of his heroes there was something of himself in masquerade. It is in the third canto of "Childe Harold" that he unmasked frankly to the public the ideal self as it had come to be at the moment of his departure from England, — the ideal of the blighted life:—

"The very knowledge that he lived in vain,
That all was over on this side the tomb."

This is the well-known refrain that through a hundred variations makes "Childe Harold" not only an elegy of nations but a personal lament of the individual life. It does not appear to me that the burden of "Childe Harold" is disillusion; it is, on the contrary, disappointment;

"We wither from our youth, we gasp away:
Sick — sick — unfound the boon, unslaked the
thirst, —"

in lines like these the mood is of the futility of life, which is as strongly felt in a thwarted

ambition as in a vanished ideal. Byron's melancholy is not that of the betrayed idealist, it seems to me, but rather of the thwarted realist; life had denied to him his will.

Power has always been the quality most immediately recognized in Byron — "the greatest force that has appeared in our literature," says Arnold, you remember, "since Shakspeare"; and every reader feels "the fiery fount" in him, that Dionysiac dæmonic force, which is the core of poetic energy. He had the unquenchable thirst for life that belongs to the poets; desires and ambitions filled him; but in the first maturity of manhood, just before he was thirty, there fell on him the certainty that he was balked, that his passion and power of life was an irony of fate, and for him only the curse of being. It is not necessary to inquire into the causes of this; the fact was so; and against this fact he revolted with a reaction of tremendous energy. It so happened that the country of his birth, England, served her poet mainly as a foil that brought out the most violent aspects of this revolt. England, in his mind, was the incarnation of that which

had defrauded him. In turn he struck back. In his religious dramas he attacked orthodoxy, and in "Don Juan" he attacked morality, as the English understood those terms; he shocked England, and still shocks her, by the blasphemy and licentiousness, as it is there described, of his verse. It was his literary revenge on his country.

He still strove for the poetic laurel; he had literary ambition to a strong degree, and his historical dramas are rooted in this ambition, the fruits of it, and are little successful, for the soil of mere ambition is not deep enough for poetry. His productiveness was great and rapid; he showed his energy in this trait, and created, as it were, by main force a drama in a month, a poem in a day. In nearly all the same strain is constant, and the despair or contempt of life is the motive that yields alike the most sincere and the most cynical verse, and makes the ground tone of the whole. It is, however, impossible not to feel that Byron's suffering was real, that in him something noble was frustrated, and that the ideal self, on which he concentrated all his power of sentiment with an

extraordinary faculty of self-pity and of self-exaltation, had genuine elements. In the last canto of "Childe Harold" he blends his own melancholy — that of the individual life — with the melancholy of the fate of human grandeur in a flow of noble eloquence and personal passion, gathering breadth and majesty under the shadow of Rome, until he pours it like a mighty river into the sea in that last magnificent apostrophe on the shores of the Mediterranean. "Childe Harold," which gave forth the first fountains of his genius, taken in its whole course, is its life-stream; it is his most noble work, and contains all his personal ascendancy in the figure of Harold, and the most powerful elements of his genius in its brooding over the life of man and of mankind, — the fate of passion in life and of glory in time. Its only rival in his fame is "Manfred," where he gave dramatic form to this same ideal self, and condensed its story in a brief and tragic play. This form is more sombre and composed, and seems more personal, more actual in its ideal self-portraiture; but this is due to its simpler definition and intense concentra-

tion. What "Childe Harold" is diffusely and elegiacally, "Manfred" is intensely and dramatically, — the ideal summary of Byron.

It was this ideal summary that in the next age became Byronism, and filled the European youth with its moods; nor should there be anything strange in this; for Byronism, despite all seeming, is the mood of strength. It contains the two halves of youthful life at the full, — its intense ardors and its profound discouragements. The melancholy of Byron is the shadow cast by his power; he lamented life because he loved it so much. It is true that for men of English blood, what seems melodramatic and sentimental and the weakness of personal complaint interferes with the appreciation of his verse; but, as I said at the beginning, Byron is not characteristically an English poet, but a poet of the Southern lands, of the Mediterranean, where he found his inspiration and his themes, and in whose neighborhood he passed his life during the composition of his works; and to men of Romance blood, and also to the German and the Slav, melodrama and sentiment and the psychology of passion are quite a different

thing from what they are in the British climate and the Anglo-Saxon temperament. The surprise and novelty of these things to Englishmen was indeed one of the causes of their immediate success in London when they were still fresh. Byron's rendering of the history and the scenes of passion is the sign royal of his poetic genius. He was, in this as in all other ways, a realist, and he presented the theme with a vividness of emotion, a rush of eloquence, and a dramatic sense of incident and of catastrophe, that make them still the best tales in poetry in our literature, as they originally drove Scott, his only rival in the game, out of the field. It was natural that with the maturing of years, and amid his own private unhappiness, he should show the darker side of the history of passion; and no poet has so painted its pains and its despairs, as in the Rousseau stanzas and many others; it is natural, too, that such an expression, so violent, so warm, so personal, so self-revealing, should be more sympathetically received by the nations of Southern temperament, who are to the manner born, and in whose lives passion plays like blood, and to

whose own experience these lines give form and meaning. Passion, the poet's gift, was Byron's endowment and experience both, and in his latest work he still drew its scenes with truth and charm beyond all others, with delight in them, even when the sequel was cynicism. It is by the variety and the fire of his renderings of real scenes of passion, and by the psychological analysis of it as an element in the wretchedness and futility of life, that he entered most intimately into the hearts of all those youths whom he so stirred upon the Continent. It was to them a part of his strength. It was as a type of strength and not of weakness that they saw him. He was to them a Promethean figure, Titanic in energy, suffering the woes of life, and warring on the gods of the old régime, the incarnation of splendid and passionate revolt against life itself. His poetry had with them the double fortune that it had in himself; it blended with their private lives on the pathetic side and with their public hopes in their revolutionary energy. For, if he was the victim of passion, he was also the apostle of liberty; no voice rang like his through

Europe in the cause of freedom, and in his death he was its martyr.

If there is one thing that is borne in on the sympathetic reader of his life, it is that the man lacked a career, — some channel for the passion and power of life in him to pour through, some cause to serve, some deed to do. In personality he reminds one of that Renaissance type, masterful, not subject to any law, reckless; and, in his later years, he seems near to the decadence, like an Italian nobleman of the degeneracy, disoccupied with life and more selfishly cynical with each revolving year. It was from this state that he roused himself to make that last effort in the cause of Greece which restored to him the robe of honor that was slipping from his shoulders. It was from one point of view a kind of suicide of genius, — the act of a man who finds nothing left but to die with honor. In seeking it, nevertheless, he recalls to us the generous qualities that were in his youth, of which the type is the Boy in the antique oratory. There was a spirit of nobility in the man's soul in early years, as his school friendships show; and though dimmed, it

was never lost. He was good metal. He had power; he had passion; and the charter of greatness was his. He had come to wreck, in his own eyes; and to ours he seems like a noble vessel chafing to pieces on the sluggish reef of time. He would end it. He remembered his youth,—when he had sat on Sunium's marble steep and dreamed that Greece might yet be free. He went back to those Adriatic shores, to the Leucadian seas, where he had coasted in the dawn of his fame, to the height of snowy Parnassus over the long purple gulf that had so stirred him, and there in its shadow, in his last stanza, he said adieu to life:—

“Seek out—less often sought than found—
A soldier's grave, for thee the best;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
And take thy rest.”

V

GRAY

I HAVE thought it appropriate to select one example of the poetic temperament, not from the "bards sublime," but from those more quiet sons of the Muse whom we call minor poets; for, though their works be in low relief, yet, if the theory is sound, they should show in their degree the traits of the grand style, as we find the same supreme Greek art even on broken vases and utensils of daily life. Certainly no one would dream of describing Gray as "mad"; the word "passion" is grotesquely inapplicable to him; and even such a phrase as "the power of life" seems dubiously to be used of his lethargic nature. He was a mild and gentle scholar, who lived in the lazy air of a university, slow in all his physique, intellectually self-indulgent, procrastinating, an invalid with

invalid habits of conduct, a dilettante, a letter-writer. His entire routine of life afflicts us with a sense of dulness and heaviness, an English atmosphere of dampness and ennui, which inclines us at once to commiseration. He wrote very little, — so marvellously little that he is, in literary history, the typical instance of unproductiveness, of sterility. The Dionysiac fire was very somnolent, to say the least, in his case. Vesuvius, however, is not always in violent eruption, and those who look on it for the most part see the mighty mountain with only a thin wisp of smoke lazily drifting upon the pale, high air; sometimes there is not even that.

In comparison with such poets as we have considered, Gray's verse is such a wisp of smoke. Yet it is fair to remember — what is oftenest forgotten — that great literature is not a constant product of this planet, that many nations have none of it to speak of, and that in favored nations it is the rarest of all their products. On the whole, poetic energy, if it has the violence and splendor of volcanic fire, has also its general reposefulness. In the intervals of activity men

are content with the minor phenomena which show the continued, though torpid, existence of the great life-principle; and the wisp of smoke is, after all, curling placidly up from the old forges within. It behooves us, especially, to be modest, for our magnificent America has never yet produced a poet even of the rank of Gray. Moreover, there is a singular circumstance in Gray's case: slight as his product was, it has had an immense fame and vogue among men. His work resembles one of those single anonymous poems of the world which have achieved fame all by themselves, unaided and alone. Little poetry has been so widely read, so familiarized in households, as the "Elegy." It has also been highly appreciated. No poem has had a finer compliment paid it than was contained in the old story of Wolfe's reciting it to his officers in the darkness of the river as he drifted down to his heroic death, and declaring that to write it was more glorious than a victory. The "Elegy," it is true, is somewhat exceptional; but the best of Gray's work has had equal immortality, and still goes wherever the English language makes its

way. No one reads Marlowe now except students in libraries and poets by profession; and the voice of Byron grows rare and distant, — his vogue evaporates; but Gray's verse still has the shining of the adamant of time upon its lines, and seems as untouched with ¹⁷⁹two centuries as Mimnermus and Theognis with twenty. Gray is among the poets who die only with the language that they breathed.

Gray did not greatly strive for fame. Perhaps there was some obstruction in his nature or his circumstances; perhaps he did not greatly care. There was, at least, no struggle in him, no restless necessity for expression, no stress of thought or of feeling. He was, as a mortal, very ordinary; and as a man of culture, very humane. He led the stillest of bachelor lives in college chambers. If he had deliberately excluded emotion from his life, he could hardly have better succeeded. Of course he was often bored, and often lazy, — that is, not unemployed, but with a scholar's laziness. He took but little interest in contemporary politics or war, and found rather amusement than any cause for excite-

ment in the spectacle of what men do. The passage in which he describes Pitt's speech, on proposing a monument for Wolfe, is typical and a melancholy comment on the admiration of Wolfe for the writer. "Pitt's second speech," he says, "was a studied and puerile declamation on funeral honors. In the course of it he wiped his eyes with one handkerchief, and Beckford, who seconded him, cried, too, and wiped with two handkerchiefs at once, which was very moving." That is typical of the way in which he looked on human affairs. They were no great matter, — Gray was a gentleman. He moved freely in the world of high life, and liked to talk of men of rank over the sweet wine he drank after his mutton. The passions of nations, the swing of ideas, the fortunes of battle, were no more to him than club topics would be to-day, news and conversation, but not exciting. He read Rousseau, he says, but "heavily, heavily"; that is, he was bored. He had his well-bred circle of friends, very polite, and his well-bred private tastes, very cultivated; but he was unmoved, habitually otiose, lethargic, oppressed with the dulness

of things very often, yet not, I think, unhappy; indeed, a certain intellectual gayety, even in describing his own dulness, is a part of the charm of his private correspondence. There was much nonchalant good breeding in him, especially as he grew up and came into the routine of manhood; he was a man of the world, not in the sense of being merely a man of society, but in the sense of being disengaged, disinterested, the impartial spectator with a light touch, a just judgment, and a tone of elegance.

In his youth he appears more amiably, though there was in him then all the promise of the type he became. He made, you remember, with three other friends at college a league of friendship known as the quadruple alliance. Walpole was one member of the set; and his friendship with Walpole characterizes the eighteenth-century tone of the social half of his nature. A second member was West, who died young and with griefs of the mind as well as with ills of the body, and who left a charming memory of himself, both in his verses and in his affection for Gray, with whom he is associated as the true youthful

comrade; and this friendship with West, in which there is an unusual high-bred demeanor considering the youth of the two, characterizes the other half of Gray's nature, the more kindly and natural half, not more intimate, but intimate with more equality; with Walpole one thinks of Gray's social history, with West one thinks of his personal charm.

This private side of his character he exhibited, it would seem, in his college residence during his mature life to younger men who were students there. The tribute that one of these young men paid to him, shortly after his death, breathes the pure spirit of such a happy relation. The passage is familiar, but can hardly be spared. The young man is writing to his mother.

"You know that I considered Mr. Gray as a second parent, that I thought only of him, built all my happiness on him, talked of him forever, wished him with me whenever I partook of any pleasure, and flew to him for refuge whenever I felt any uneasiness. To whom now shall I talk of

all I have seen here? Who will teach me to read, to think, to feel? I protest to you that whatever I did or thought had a reference to him. If I met with any chagrins, I comforted myself that I had a treasure at home; if all the world had despised and hated me, I should have thought myself perfectly recompensed in his friendship. There remains only one loss more; if I lose you, I am left alone in the world. At present I feel that I have lost half myself."

Another instance of the cordiality with which he welcomed youth, at least when it appealed to him at all, is his remark on the Swiss Bonstettin, who so uselessly tried to make Gray talk of his own poetry and personal affairs. "I never saw such a boy," says Gray; "our breed is not made on this model."

A life, so untouched with worldly unrest, so withdrawn in happy privacies of companionship and of gentle tastes, so breathing the air of delightful studies, lying wrapt and sombre in our minds between the church-yard repose and the collegiate hush, is almost

monastic in its effect. Yet the impression needs to be relieved by other traits. Gray, for example, was a traveller, and at times he escaped from this seclusion of himself, for if the mind does not change with travel, it at least moves under different lights. He made the journey through France, when he was young, with Walpole, and went into Italy as far as Naples. Whether he derived it from this excursion or not, he had a liking for travel,—I dare not call it a passion,—but it was perhaps such an enthusiasm as his veins were capable of. It is said that he had mapped out every picturesque journey in England, and in the middle of the eighteenth century picturesque journeys in England for an elegant gentleman like Mr. Gray were really proofs of enterprise. He was early hardened to travel on the road and had knowledge of inns, and in these journeys was his slight taste of adventure,—all he had. Just before he died he seemed to feel that his only hope lay in travel. The fact of his saying so shows how much travel had meant to him in his life. The notes he made of his Italian travel, for example, exhibit the quality

of his mind with great clearness. He was mentally vastly curious; his intellectual curiosity was unbounded, and shows primarily in him the mind of the scholar; not the mind of the thinker at all, — for he seldom generalizes, — but that of the scholar, the collector of knowledge; for knowledge may be collected like snuff-boxes or fossils, and the scholar's learning is not infrequently a sort of museum. Such a museum was Gray's mind. On his Italian journey one sees him in the act of collecting it with youthful enthusiasm. He catalogues the pictures and marbles, and describes and comments briefly upon them; he maps the cities, the squares and buildings, the river and the road, and the ruins beside the way. In Naples, especially, one is struck by the thoroughness with which he explored the ancient district to the west of the city, the diversity of interests he found there, the fulness, minuteness, and variety of his account, compressed though it is, and above all by the interest he took in it. His open and cordial spirit toward foreign things — not a frequent trait in first travels — is extraordinary. He was plainly a careful traveller,

laborious and fruitful in observation, storing up multitudes of facts. This, which is so plainly seen in the Italian notes, is characteristic of his mind in all its accumulations.

He was a connoisseur of the fine arts, not merely in the major arts, painting, sculpture, and architecture, but in prints, antiquities, gardening. He applied himself to natural sciences in several fields, like Goethe, and made the best account of English insects up to that time. He was profound, for his age, in history, and commanded foreign history in its own languages. He was as fond of reading travels as of travelling, and interested himself in geography; he investigated heraldry. He was expert in the literature of the art of cooking. He understood music. He was an excellent scholar in Greek, then a rare accomplishment, and very thorough in his pursuit of it, where he had some of the qualities of a pioneer. Clearly, he had a wonderfully acquisitive mind for facts, and also a singular capacity for the development of æsthetic tastes of diverse kinds. He was a man of comprehensive faculty and consequently of erudition.

His information, however, retained the general character of the note-book and the handbook; it was miscellaneous, but exact and detailed. For such collections as have been described a great deal of industry was required, though it was an industry that might seem to Gray often a waste of time and a kind of laziness; in details one often seems bewilderingly idle, at the best, and Gray's mind worked by details. In the midst of such occupations which are in themselves the leisure of a college life, he sometimes found time to write, or to cancel, a line of his poetry, to file a phrase or meditate an epithet, and from one nine years to another to publish a poem. There was no hurry, no need; he never wrote for the public, nor for money; he made verses as a man of taste, just as he collected butterflies or prints, for his own pleasure.

There is no psychological problem, no temperamental puzzle in Gray. The inquiry why he wrote so little, which seems to be the main concern of his critics, is futile. Ill health, low spirits, dissipation of mind on a multitude of pursuits and interests are alleged

as one reason; but great poets have been so afflicted without losing their voice. That he fell on an age of prose is also brought forward to account for the fact; but his own mind was not at all prosaic; even the pursuit of science could not make it so. He did not choose, did not care to write very much. What he did write he wished to be perfect, — just as every letter of his manuscript is carefully made, even in his loosest notes. He had no great range in the world of poetry. He was interested in neither strong emotions nor great ideas. In religion being, as he said, no great wit, he believed in a God; and he left the matter there. He was never emotionally stirred by any great experience beyond that bereavement which is the common human heritage. All his life was at a low temperature, and the reasons of his infertility seem less circumstantial than constitutional.

The classicism, in which he was intellectually bred, suggested and gave body and form to his development. He was chiefly a moralist; in substance of the Latin tradition, using the Roman mode of abstract imagination and

bringing forward those contemporary eighteenth-century figures of Fear, or Madness, or Adversity, which together make a kind of philosophical and bodiless mythology in which man's psychical fortunes are externalized like phantoms, — bloodless and weak creatures that are to true mythology what the shade of Achilles in Hades was to the glorious earthly manhood of the hero. The treatment, however, was far better than the substance, for he employed for this the original Greek method of idyllic art. He was characterized, as I have said, by interest in detail. In his art it is the same. He was a connoisseur in words, and thought that poetry has a diction of its own, more select than the language of common life, and he was careful to employ this colored and somewhat exquisite language, word by word. He built the line out of the words, and the line rather than the phrase is his unit of style. He filed each line, and composed the stanza, and of the stanzas the completed poem. At each step he took a short view; to have the fit word, the well-moulded line, the stanza, the poem. In all this process he worked by the method

of detail; it is what we sometimes call in verse jeweller's work, or miniature work. The latter phrase is the most suggestive, for it indicates that the poem is made up of successive pictures, linked together in a larger composition, or else simply left to succeed each other in a pleasing order. This is the classical idyllic method of verse, which he learned at first hand from the Greek, but in the English use of which he was instructed by Milton in such a poem as "L'Allegro" and its companion piece. The method is most familiar to us in Tennyson's "Palace of Art" or "Lady of Shalott."

Gray was not so finished an artist as Milton or Tennyson, and one reason of this is, I think, because he was more directly and exclusively dependent on his taste in the fine arts. It is true that he had natural taste, and knew that poetry is good only when born in the open, or must be written, in Arnold's phrase, with the eye on the object. It is not a very adequate phrase, for it suggests realistic rather than imaginative treatment. Gray's eye was certainly not on any object when he wrote: —

“Now the golden Morn aloft
Waves her dew-bespangled wing,
With vermeil cheek and whisper soft
She wooes the tardy Spring;”

but one feels in these lines the reminiscence of painting, — the “vermeil cheek” is the glowing of the color softened as he had seen it on canvass and not on any ruddy English maiden. The whole passage is fresco painting; and so, it seems to me, as I read on, I see a painted landscape: —

“Yesterday the sullen year
Saw the snowy whirlwind fly;
Mute was the music of the air,
The herd stood drooping by.”

This is a natural scene, but it is carefully composed, the atmosphere of the snow-squall first, and the herd in the foreground. Farther on, the poem becomes frankly pictorial, using the painter’s art as a metaphor and not to form a picture: —

“The hues of bliss more brightly glow,
Chastised by sabler tints of woe,
And blended, form with artful strife,
The strength and harmony of life.”

The method of this poem is obviously that of painting in these passages.

It appears to me also that he uses composition — I mean the grouping of figures — very often to give such life as is possible to those dreary figures of the family of sorrow, and make them pleasing; unless he does so, he leaves the present generation at least with a very dissatisfied sense of beholding merely allegoric images little alluring in themselves. I mean such composition as this: —

“Amazement in his van, with flight combined,
And sorrow’s faded form, and solitude behind.”

So, too, the same holds of the numerous dances, rings, and bevvies to be found in his verse, all of which seem to me like reminiscences of wall-painting. His imagination was internally controlled by the art of painting, even when most natural; it is not merely in the occasional coloring and composition, such as I have instanced, but especially in his habitual careful use of perspective. In nearly every poem examples may be found of this peculiar sensitiveness to dis-

tance, and he seldom fails to give either horizon or centring to the view. The first stanza of the Eton Ode gives an easy example of such a prospect, complete in background, in foreground:—

“Ye distant spires, ye antique towers,
That crown the watery glade,
Where grateful Science still adores
Her Henry’s holy shade;
And ye that from the stately brow
Of Windsor’s heights the expanse below
Of grove, of lawn, of mead survey,
Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among
Wanders the hoary Thames along
His silver-winding way.”

Generally, however, it is by a brief stroke that the effect, the idyllic picture, is given. He was especially fond of the sight of a distant march on the mountain-side. Here are some instances which need only to be read—this of the sunrise:—

“Night and all her sickly dews,
Her spectres wan, and birds of boding cry,
He gives to range the dreary sky,
Till down the eastern cliffs afar
Hyperion’s march they spy, and glittering shafts
of war.”

Or this: —

“Such were the sounds that o’er the crested pride
Of the first Edward scattered wild dismay,
As down the steep of Snowdon’s shaggy side
He wound with toilsome march his long array.”

Or this very simple but perfect scene: —

“Far, far aloof the affrighted ravens sail;
The famished eagle screams and passes by.”

And that other eagle —

“Nor the pride, nor ample pinion
That the Theban eagle bear,
Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the azure deep of air.”

Or for a near scene, and one illustrating
Gray’s love of wild majesty in nature: —

“Hark how each giant oak and desert cave
Sighs to the torrent’s awful voice beneath.”

Or, again, the well-known image of the progress of poetry: —

“Now the rich stream of music winds along,
Deep, majestic, smooth and strong,
Through verdant vales and Ceres’ golden reign;
Now rolling down the steep amain,
Headlong, impetuous, see it pour;
The rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar.”

The same poem yields another of those large-motioned scenes on the wide prospect:—

“Behold where Dryden’s less presumptuous car
Wide o’er the fields of glory bear
Two courses of ethereal race,
With necks in thunder clothed and long-resounding
pace.”

Examination will show, I think, the predominance in Gray’s imagination of scenes thus guided by his eye for coloring, composition, and perspective in the painter’s rather than the poet’s way. He uses perspective metaphorically where, for example, in the laughter of the morning on the sea the whirlwind “expects his evening prey,” and again, just below, where

“Long years of Havoc urge their destined course;”
and we find it, curiously enough, transformed both to the sense of hearing and to the realm of metaphor:—

“And distant warblings lessen on my ear,
And lost in long futurity expire.”

Observe, too, how in the opening of the “Elegy” the landscape is thus built up, with

the horizon, the half-distance, and the foreground:—

“The curfew tolls the knell of parting day;
The lowing herd wind slowly o’er the lea;
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

“Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight;
And all the air a solemn stillness holds;
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds.

“Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wandering near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign;”

and the eye is brought to rest thus on the dark churchyard, with its shadowy trees and obscure hillocks and hollows of the turf.

Gray, then, was a poet, in the main a moralist, using an imaginative method to inlay the moral sentiment of the verse with miniatures, in the Greek idyllic mode, but miniatures which have in them the scope of fresco and canvass by virtue of his use of color, composition, and perspective, for which he was indebted to the fine art of

painting, by whose means he interpreted nature and also realized allegory. The scope of his interest as a moralist was narrow and commonplace, and hardly exceeded the ordinary English view of life as a scene of misery of which the last act is the burial service. He relieves on his vision of spring, you remember, the figure of the convalescent invalid as the climax of happiness in that season; he sees the Eton schoolboys on a background of the actualities of life suggesting rather the hospital and the jail than a battleground; he leads all seasons and fortunes up to the inevitable hour and converges the paths of glory to the grave. It is a familiar English view, and was familiar to our fathers at least. He is not lacking in other powers, in satirical and light, almost gay, verse, as in the story of the cat and the goldfish, where he paints the fate of lovely woman. It is not a cheerful fate, though cheerfully described. Nor is there anything cheerful in Gray, except the alleviations of our misery by the rosy hours of morning, the fragrance breathing from the ground, and the bliss of ignorance in school days. The characteristic

of Gray is a sombre view, in which brilliant artistic colors are inlaid by an imaginative rendering of history and nature. His artistic faculty distinguishes him in his commonplace morality; but as a leader in a new world, with the passion and power to bring it into being, he seems to have no place, nor was there in his life the fermentation of any profound experience.

He does present, nevertheless, certain faint signs of the characteristics of poetic genius. For one thing, his verse was an innovation. Excepting the "Elegy," which, as he truly said, succeeded by its subject and would have succeeded had it been prose, his verse was a puzzle to his contemporaries and its acceptance was slow; it was long before men selected him as without question the chief poet of his generation, and longer before they knew that his works were a classic of his language. Yet he originated nothing; his originality lay only in the fact that, being sincere and having a sound critical faculty of high order, he was true to the great tradition of poetry which had been lost in England, and by his respect for Shakspeare and Milton and for the

ancient classics he was enabled to cultivate the qualities of imagination, melody, and nature which are essential to poetry. He was saved from his century by his taste. He was, however, so exceptional in this that his practice had the force of originality, being an innovation, and he to this extent suffered the initial contempt that a poet often receives in his own age. But he was an innovator, a pioneer in more important ways. It is obvious in his learned tastes that he was not only in advance of his age, but in advance along the whole line. His study of both science and history foreknew the great career of both these branches in the next century. He was an archæologist, too, in the kingdom of which many of us now live. And besides these broad premonitions of the age to come, he had the clarity of genius in three specific particulars in his own art.

The first of these prophetic traits was his devotion to Greek. It is true that in this he was the heir of Milton and the humanists, but he went forward well into the paths of our quite different modern scholarship. Three times in the last century English poetry

has been dipped in Castaly all over, and risen radiant from the bath: in the person of Shelley and his comrades, in that of Tennyson, and in that of Swinburne. Gray was the premonition of this, and a forerunner as was none of his contemporaries. Secondly, he was a discoverer of the romance of primitive literature. He was made enthusiastic by Ossian, and valued that verse much as did men upon the Continent. He was attracted by Gaelic, and the monument of this is that Welsh ode from which I have read, which is poetically his greatest work, with touches of the sublime in both its mood and language, — a great English ode. In obeying this taste he showed that glimmer of the romantic dawn, then far away, which brought with it the romance of the Highlands and the Sagas, the old Saxon poetry, the Song of Roland, and all the early literature of the romance tongue, and which now includes the ingathering from all primitive peoples. Thirdly, he was a lover of wild and majestic scenery, and of the picturesque beauty of the English land, a landscape lover, and even in his prose notes later poets have found ore for their own

golden lines. In this he foreran the poetry of nature, which became so large an element in the romantic age. He did not philosophize nature, nor etherealize it, nor idealize it; but he saw it and responded. In comparison with the great nature-poets, such as Wordsworth and Byron, his rendering of nature is slight indeed; it is, perhaps, no more than the brightening of our willow stems in the clear east winds of morning hours, but it is a sign of spring. In these three ways, each a main direction of development, Gray was a sharer in that quality of genius by which it is symptomatic of the future, sentient of it, and an exponent of it before the fact.

But, though we may trace these ties of consanguinity with the great poets and find a few drops of the royal blood in Gray, yet if we are true to our own impression and speak justly, I think that neither passion nor prescience of change are much in our minds when we read his verse. It is true that his poetry displays more passion than that of his contemporaries, in its lyric fulness and sweep; but, after all, it is a reminiscence and not an inspiration,

it is stylistic passion, a passion for the roll and fall of words, a passion of rhetoric, and it is an echo, besides, given back by his classical tastes. He likes to show the tone and compass of his instrument, and the instrument is the lyre. At his best he is remembering Pindar; and as in that picture I read of the Theban eagle, he seems to be rather drawing on paper the evolutions of the bird than taking flight himself.

Our main feeling after reading him is that he is a classic. No other English poet gives the feeling in so pure a form; as if, except for the coloring of time, he might have written these pieces, that seem relics and fragments, being so few, in some far-off century in Ionia. One critic, Professor Tovey, the best it seems to me of Gray, says, very appositely, "that poetry is the most securely immortal which has gained nothing and can lose nothing by the vicissitudes of sentiment and opinion." That is a mark of the classic, and Gray bears it. To rise outside of the circle of change is hardly given to mortals, but one mode of approaching such a state is to live in commonplace. Gray was a contemplative moralist,

and his thought is commonplace; but if he had a passion for anything, it was for perfection, for finish, in the way of expression; and by virtue of this instinct, which never slept in him, he dignified and adorned the commonplace English view of life. He, moreover, was sombre; and he chose for his theme the most solemn point of view in life, the resting-place after death. He was very sincere in this; you will find, from early days, in his letters to his friends the idea that men are at their best, that the soul is in its best earthly estate, in the times of their bereavement. He certainly believed this, and his poetry is indebted to this profound belief. The "Elegy" is a universal poem, because its material is so commonplace that it might, as he suggested, have been written in prose, but it is dignified and adorned, perfected in expression till it seems as inevitable in every word as the "inevitable hour" itself. This artistic handling of the theme is what the poet in Gray added to the phraser of commonplaces; the combination works the miracle that such a gentleman as Gray was, such a remote scholar as he was, should turn out to be the poet

of ordinary people. Gray, as I said, was very humane; in essentials an ordinary human nature deepened into poetry by a grave tenderness of feeling and expressing himself with a pure clarity of thought. Though a classic, he does not belong with the great poets. His work reminds me most often of the minor craftsmanship of the Greek artisans, who made of common clay for common use the images and funeral urns; such seems to me the material of his poems; but in form how perfect they are, both for grace and dignity, and they are adorned, like the Greek vases, with designs, little pictures, imitated from and echoing the greater arts. If the poetic fire in them be rather a warmth than a flame, yet they are lovely receptacles of its half-extinct ashes.

VI

TASSO

THE poetic temperament is consanguineous in all the poets, and hence in passing from one to another one is always noticing some sign of kinship. Tasso reminds us of certain traits of both Gray and Byron; the classical scholarship of the one and the Mediterranean quality of the other ally them to the Italian, and the melancholy which in one was an elegy of the churchyard and in the other an elegy of nations, becomes in Tasso an elegy of life itself; moreover, there was in Tasso's personality an irritable self-consciousness that recalls Byron's egoistical sensitiveness. In another way Tasso so exceeded Gray in power, and Byron in charm, that he seems out of their class; and he has always been in men's memories so signal an example

of the misfortune that attends the poets as to seem almost solitary in his miseries.

He was by his nature exposed to every acute feeling; and his education was such as to increase his peril, and make his sorrow sure. He was the son of a distinguished poet, of noble family, and born at Sorrento; his memory still haunts the place, but his residence there was brief, and his life is associated rather with the north of Italy, whence his family came from a town near Venice. Still a child, he was separated from his mother, his father being in trouble and a wanderer, and he never saw her afterward; it is probable that she was poisoned. He joined his father, and was educated at the court of Urbino, and the Universities of Padua and Bologna. He was an extraordinarily precocious child, and while still at Sorrento had been given into the hands of the Jesuit fathers, who impressed upon him that religiousness which so deeply marked him and was the cause of much of his suffering. He took his first communion at the age of nine; he recited original verses and speeches at the age of ten; and while yet but eighteen, he published a

considerable poem, "Rinaldo," which immediately gave him great reputation in Italy, and determined his career.

He entered the service of the Duke of Ferrara, with whose name his biography is most closely joined. His life is obscure with mysteries that time has not cleared away. He was a favorite of the Duke; yet in the height of his fame, the Duke put him in prison and kept him there for over seven years, in spite of protests and petitions from princes and prelates and other persons of importance. It was long supposed that the reason was Tasso's devotion to the Duke's sister, who was his friend and the lady of his sonnets. The weight of opinion now is that, whatever concurring causes there may have been, Tasso's own condition and conduct gave sufficient excuse for restraint. He had within him the germs of insanity, and with every year they seem to have shown more violent manifestation. He was full of suspicion and resentments, and repeatedly had left his patron suddenly and gone to others, only to return again; he had hallucinations also; and, as time went on, he saw and conversed

with spirits; sometimes it was his worldly or literary affairs, sometimes his religious fears that were the motives and subjects of this mental disturbance; the Duke said that he kept Tasso confined in order to cure him. He was allowed full liberty of correspondence, and was seen by friends and visitors. Montaigne so saw him, — the poet being asleep apparently and shown by his jailer. Tasso's letters are full of details and terrible complaints; but how much of what he wrote may he not have fancied? The facts are insoluble. Some ascribe his madness to his love, some to his religious education. At all events the care of the insane was then but a poor sort of medicine, and prisons in those days were places of negligence, filth, and sickness. If only a small part of what Tasso relates of his confinement is true, it is enough to justify the pity that he has always received. It is singular, if there were no other reason for the Duke's conduct than the poet's mental state, that he should so obstinately have refused to let him go into the care of other princes and courts who were anxious to receive and aid him. At last he was released;

and after that time he lived mainly at Naples and Rome, where he died at the age of fifty years, just before he was to be publicly crowned with laurel in the Capitol.

It does not appear that, except for a few outbursts of violence, his insanity was such as to interfere with the usual action of his intellectual powers as a scholar and a poet; the higher faculties were left untouched, while his sense of fact was subject to delusion. His young friend, Manso, was a witness of a conversation at Naples between Tasso and the spirit with whom he talked; both voices, says Manso, were Tasso's, though he did not seem aware of it. Such was Tasso's madness, — an over-excitement of genius; in consequence he passed much of his life in prison or in wanderings from city to city in Italy, often with much hardship, but oftener treated with kindness and great honor, except that at Ferrara the fact of his fame and his favor in the earlier years exposed him to the jealous persecution natural to a small court. He was a man very masculine in appearance, uncommonly tall, broad-shouldered, grave in demeanor, of the blond type, with blue

eyes, well-exercised in the use of arms. He stammered, and seldom laughed, and was slow in talk. But this portrait is from his last years, and the pale sunken cheeks and worn look, which are also mentioned, belong rather to the victim of life than to the young poet who wrote the great Italian epic, "Jerusalem Delivered."

Tasso was a voluminous writer. His works fill thirty-three large volumes; but his fame is comprised within the limits of this epic, and of another small pastoral drama, "Aminta," which is related to his genius somewhat as "Hero and Leander" is to Marlowe. Apart from the brutal miseries of his life, the true and unavoidable tragedy of it lay in a conflict which took place within his own nature. He was a poet with the qualities of one; but his temperament was developed in a double way. On the one hand it was an artistic nature grounded in scholarship, not unlike Gray in that respect; on the other hand it was a religious nature grounded in the asceticism and exaltation of the Jesuit training of his precocious childhood. The two natures were contradictory; and in the

lifelong struggle between them, reflected in his literary work, the religious nature finally triumphed. In his last years he rewrote his epic, and left out its charm in obedience to his conscience; but fortunately the original version was already in the hands of the world, and the later one is now completely forgotten.

He had chosen his subject and sketched out parts, at least, of the poem before he was twenty years old; and as he composed, he labored over the verse, and refined and revised it, with great care. It was the period known as the Catholic Reaction, during which the Church crushed the Reformation in Italy and withered the Renaissance there, and thus prepared for Italy the centuries of her servitude from which she has arisen only in our day. Tasso was acutely anxious that his poem should be in harmony with Catholic truth and pious feeling, and he submitted it to ecclesiastical criticism; the worry of his mind over the trouble that thus arose was, it must be thought, one grave cause of his malady; but though he modified the verse, he did not then entirely destroy what he loved so much, its

poetic beauty. He had chosen a Christian theme, the recovery of Christ's sepulchre by the crusading knights, and he would treat it worthily, with seriousness and piety; but nevertheless the poetic art was a tradition, and he was bound, as a scholar with the tastes and principles of the Renaissance, to obey the tradition of Homer and Virgil no less than he was obliged as a faithful son of the Church to listen respectfully to the views of Puritan Cardinals. He must write a classic epic; and the poem is, in fact, not only classical in its general conduct and method, but in detail echoes the "Iliad" and the "Æneid" much as Milton echoes the Bible, and a reader familiar with the classics takes the same pleasure in these echoes that a reader familiar with the Bible takes in the words and imagery of "Paradise Lost."

The epic, however, when it came into Tasso's hands, had added something to the classic tradition, and had changed it in important particulars; especially two things had been brought prominently forward, namely, magic, and the interest of love. The presence of these two new elements in their

degree of development made of the epic so different a thing, that a new name was coined to describe it, and it was called a romantic epic in opposition to the older style. Tasso's theme was an admirable epic subject; it was noble in itself, and one in which the powers of heaven and hell, whose participation was thought necessary in epic verse, could appropriately be introduced; the combatants on both sides were worthy champions, so that the martial interest could be well maintained; and the subject was made Italian and brought home to the present hour by the link that bound the poem to the House of Este, at Ferrara. In fact, the entire ground of the poem was near to the contemporary age, in the point that the Mohammedan power was still a dreaded foe and held the Mediterranean, so that the feeling of hostility was acute, and, besides, the physical aspect of the Saracen East was well known; Italy and Christendom still faced that way. The taking of Jerusalem was a more contemporary topic than we are apt to think, and the poem appealed to a living fear and hatred; thus,

though not a national poem, it had some of the qualities of one, and it stirred a martial ardor not wholly extinct.

The martial interest is in the foreground, and is developed in the verse to the greatest degree possible. The course of the war is deployed with skill, so as to open an ever wider field of operation and to increase steadily in importance and interest till it culminates in the fall of the city. In detail every kind of warfare is depicted, — the single combat by challenge, the personal encounters by accident, the *mêlée* of the armies and the individual fight in its midst, the night attack, the siege, the assault, — every variety of battle, even to the cutting off and total destruction of a corps marching to the assistance of the Christians under a Danish chief, which may perhaps be exemplified for us by such an action as the Indian massacre of Custer's command. Tasso's descriptions of these scenes are admirable for spirit and variety of detail, and I find his military operations less tedious than those of most epics. In the contrast of the two civilizations he is also successful,

and he renders the opposition of creed and manners, the barbaric and the pagan to the civilized and the Christian, with vividness and yet not so as to degrade the enemy. In the characterization, again, on both sides he is excellent, and he gives much distinctness even to the minor persons, which is unusual in epics, while the heroes are vigorously and diversely drawn. The main heroes are, of course, removed from the field early in the action by one device and another in order to give the others their opportunity to act, while the greater characters themselves come in to make the climax of interest and valor toward the end. All this is in the ancient classical manner, like the "Æneid" and "Iliad." So is the bringing in of the supernatural powers, the angels on one side and the devils on the other, corresponding to the partisanship of the gods in the old epics; but here Tasso suffers from the powerful rivalry of Milton. Tasso's devils are merely mediæval monsters, and his angels have little to do. His imagination would in any case have been checked in its free action by Catholic scruples.

The place of the old gods of Olympus is, however, really taken by the romantic element of magic, in obedience to which indeed the devils also act; and it is not in the court of Heaven, but in the witch, Armida, that the counterpart of Juno's hatred for the Trojans is to be found. Magic had been popularized in poetry, especially by Ariosto, and Tasso followed here this master and the popular taste. Perhaps to us the poem is much enfeebled thereby and loses reality; it seems so to me, at least; it becomes almost a fable, Arabian. On the other hand, magic as an artistic device frees the fancy of Tasso and makes him the master of surprise. It is here that he begins to be himself, and to write with his own unaided hand; but it is in the second element that he derived from the romantic epic — the element of love — that he is the master and comes to his own. If he treats of battle in all its phases, it is from a sense of duty, in part; but he depicts love in its various forms because it is his pleasure. War he learned from other men's books, and mastered by imagination; but in love he was lessoned only by his own heart, and

in the story he gave out experience. It is the more singular because he was not of an amorous nature, but was rather indulgent to ascetic feelings. His imagination was warm, and it is rather the sentiment than the passion of love that he depicts; and he always blends it with nobleness of nature. Dante's line — "love is but one thing with the gentle heart" — might be the formula of all these varied scenes.

In the second canto he introduces one such episode, and one that was so cherished by him that he refused to cut it out at the bidding of the ecclesiastics who advised him. It is the story of the Christian maid, Sophronia, who is drawn almost like a nun, and who to save her people confesses to an act that had incensed the tyrant ruler of Jerusalem; she stands at the stake to be burned, when her lover, Olindo, who had not dared to show his love, recognizes her, and at once confesses to the same act; it is plain that both are guiltless, but both are condemned to burn at the same stake. As the flames approach, he tells her his love as being about to die. The execution, however, is

stayed in a natural way, and the two are released to a life together. Such a happy issue is rare, nevertheless, in Tasso. It was believed that in *Sophronia* he drew the figure of his lady, *Leonora*, the Duke's sister, and in *Olindo* the veiled love he bore her; and thus in this fable pleaded his own cause.

In the other great instances of his portraiture of love the persons are the leading characters of the poem, and not introduced merely episodically. He drew three types. *Tancred*, the chief Christian hero after *Rinaldo*, is in love with the Saracen warrior-maid, *Clorinda*; in his passion he is the typical knight of chivalry. Thus he fell in love with her at first sight, and her face at any time makes him oblivious to all else, even the call of honor in battle; she, being an Amazon and a pagan, is entirely indifferent to him; it is only at the last moment and by a miracle that, when being vizored they fight and he kills her, in the act of dying she asks him for baptism and is reconciled. She afterwards appears to him in a dream and confesses her love. *Tancred* is also the hero of the second type, *Erminia*, a Saracen princess

whom he had rescued and treated with great kindness and who fell in love with his gentleness and nobleness. She was no warrior, but a tender woman to whom love gave courage, and she stole away from Jerusalem by night in the armor of Clorinda, to go to the Christian camp and heal him when he was wounded, for she understood the art of healing; but she was frightened on the way and fled to some shepherds, with whom she remains until near the end of the story, when she returns to care for him after Clorinda's death. The third type is the love of the witch, Armida, for Rinaldo; she enchains this youth, the Achilles of the poem, meaning to destroy him, but is overcome by her love for him, and transports him to her garden in the Atlantic Ocean, whence he is rescued by holy aid and recalled to the war. He leaves her, and she follows, seeking revenge, but still in love, and attends the pagan army; in the final defeat she is saved by Rinaldo, and desires to become a Christian through her love for him.

These three poetic types of womanhood, the tragic type in Clorinda, the pathetic

type in Erminia, and the romantic type in Armida, give a wide compass to Tasso in the interpretation of the passion. In each case love overcomes, equally master over magic, over the coldness of the Amazon, and over woman's simple heart; in all love is victorious. The two knights also yield to love; but the passion is represented rather in the women than the men, and hence the poem is most famous for these three types of womanhood rather than for its heroic figures, and more for love than for war. In Spenser's "Faery Queen," you remember, in the same way the female characters excel the knights in interest. Tasso is thus peculiarly the poet of love; excellent as he is in the martial and truly epic part of his task, it is in the romantic part and in the passion, that is rather lyrical than epic, that he is a supreme and unequalled master. It is natural to find that the traits which most attract his readers are those that depend on the predominance of love in the verse.

It is characteristic of the poem that its atmosphere counts for more than its substance; the power of fascination is in the

atmosphere; and, in fact, the substance itself tends to pass into, to evaporate into, mere atmosphere. This is an important point. You will observe in reading it, for example, how large a part the landscape plays in giving tone to the most charming scenes. It is, of course, Italian landscape that is used, though the scene is Palestine. It is, moreover, selected Italian landscape, — seashore, glens, quiet places in the hills; and, besides, this landscape is brightened and adorned, in the manner of painting or of stage illusion. One recalls especially the moonlight scenes, such as that where the light touching the armor of Erminia betrays her on her flight, — or the pastoral scenes, such as the remote spot where she found refuge with the shepherd boys; and again the garden scenes, especially those of Armida's island, which gave to Spenser his Bower of Bliss and to Milton his Eden.

It has been noticed that light rather than color characterizes the poem; it is filled with light and chiaroscuro, but not with hues; in fact, it seems to me that the place of color is, as it were, taken by sound. It is true

that the poem has a landscape setting, characteristically Italian, quiet, reposeful, of ideal beauty; but it has also another setting in the sense of hearing, which is constantly appealed to, as if music in the strict sense were an element of the scene. It is not merely that the birds are always there, but sound in many forms breathes in various concords. A brief example is the charm that greets Rinaldo in the enchanted wood —

“a sound

Sweet as the airs of Paradise upsprings;
Hoarse roars the shallow brook; the leaves around,
Sigh to the fluttering of the light wind's wings;
Her ravishing sweet dirge the cygnet sings,
Loud mourn the answering nightingales; sad shells,
Flutes, human voices tuned to golden strings,
And the loud surging organ's glorious swells, —

all these make up a hidden orchestra heard in one. And again, a little farther on, it rises:

“Impearled with manna was each fresh leaf nigh:
Honey and golden gums the rude trunks weep;
Again is heard that strange wild harmony
Of songs and sorrows, plaintive, mild and deep;
But the sweet choirs that still such tenor keep
With the swans, winds and waves, no ear can trace
To their concealed abode in shade or steep;

Nor harp, nor horn, nor form of human face,
Look where he would, was seen in all the shady place.'

Such a hidden harmony and secret accompaniment go through the poem, and sphere it in music as the landscape spheres it in visible beauty. It is as if various belts, like Saturn's rings, were wound about the poem and shed colored light upon it.

The Italian is a subtle genius, and Tasso excels in subtlety. It is a thing difficult to describe, but more even than by landscape and music the poem is enveloped in emotionalism, of which perhaps the constant appeal to pathos is the most obvious form. A simple detached instance is the death of the Soldan's page, in the ninth canto, slain in battle where like a child he was playing at war. Every artifice is used to enhance the mere pity of his savage death. Pathos, however, pervades the poem. Emotionalism is still more intensely present in the tragic and pathetic and romantic treatment of love directly in the three types already mentioned. It has been pointed out that the characteristic phrase of Tasso is that by which he so often expresses his failure to express himself,

— that is, his sense of the inexpressible, — the phrase *non so che*, “I know not what.” So he describes the last words of Clorinda when she asked baptism of Tancred, who had killed her —

“Like dying lyres heard far at close of day,
Sounding I know not what in the soothed ear
Of sweetest sadness, — the faint words made way.”

Tasso thus habitually at the highest moment of feeling takes refuge in the mystery of the unexpressed.

It is evident that such qualities as these, beauty of such a type, such a use of music, such pathos, sorrow, and yearning of life, cannot but impart weakness to a martial epic poem, as such, and diffuse through it a relaxation of the heroic quality. The character of the heroes is enfeebled in many ways, — in Tancred and Rinaldo by the love element and in Godfrey, the leader, by his prudence; it is rather among the Saracens and in the minor Christian knights that the heroic quality is most purely preserved, the simple martial manhood of the enterprise; but, in proportion as the inward life enters

into the characterization, as the psychology becomes interesting, the epic power is diminished.

This is equivalent to saying that in the characteristic part of his poem Tasso obeys a lyrical impulse. The emotion to which he is most sensitive is not martial, but tender; the things he loves are not the things of war, but of charm; and more and more, as his true mood grows upon him, he emerges in the region of mere beauty and delight, and sings, not the epic of action, but the lyric of feeling. Once, indeed, in the climax of the garden of Armida, the highest point of the mood is frankly given in a song. With all his epical dexterity, Tasso is primarily lyrical by genius, and his love of landscape, music, and the emotional disburdening of his spirit are forms of his lyricism. Beauty, grace, kindness, gentleness, nobility, are the things he loved and responded to, and rather with a lament than with a pæan. For the scene of life is presented with vigor in the action, it is true, by an intellectual *tour de force* in description, of which he had learned the art from books

such as Homer; but the scene of life is also and more markedly represented with great melancholy in the thought and after-issue of the action, with unceasing and irrepressible sadness. The history of love in the poem is nowhere a happy history, and Tasso pleaded this fact in his strife with the ecclesiastics who disapproved of these scenes. The whole field of life here represented is one of sorrow and death, — the woes of men; but the great test of the militant spirit of life — delight in victory — is strangely absent. There is no joy of victory anywhere in the poem. Though Jerusalem falls, and the knights enter in triumph, this seems a very unimportant incident at the end, and merely winds up the poem. The poem is really done, when we know the fate of the lovers in it.

So far from victory being felt in the poem, it is the sense of the difficulty of life, of the thwarting of life, of its sad fates, — the sense, in a word, of the unaccomplished, — that most remains with the reader. The feeling of the inexpressible — the *non so che* of his favorite phrase — is one with the feeling of the un-

attained. Tasso's view of life thus ends not in action, but in an attitude toward life, a certain cast of thought and habit of emotion. It is not merely that action is not the true subject and interest of the poem; but rather emotion divorced from action, pure emotion; mere feeling in its own realm is the characteristic trait and charm of this verse; and therein lies Tasso's original genius as distinct from all that he inherited from the old masters. He was an extremely sensitive poet, with an excitable imagination cultivated in its exercise by the most highly developed artistic tradition, not only in poetry but in all the arts; but from his precocious adolescence to the close of his career, he was brought in contact with real life only in the sphere of the sentiments, and for the most part only in the region of an ideal love for the lady Leonora. His touch on life had been almost exclusively through the imagination, and his pleasures and sorrows had been in that realm, in a true sense. No wonder he became visionary even to the point of mental disease, that is, of hallucination; but in the sphere outside of hallucina-

tion his ordinary daily life was still imaginative. It was natural that there should grow up in such a genius a prepossession for emotional states little related to action, a love for emotion just for its own sake, as if it were the effect of a drug.

The point of culture he marks lies, thus, in emotionalism toward beauty and joy, sensuously felt through their charm, but becoming an end in itself for the sake of the emotion only. This is the secret of his love of music, for it is in music that emotion is most freely experienced in this pure form disjoined from action. In his poetry art is seen on the way to music, and his lyrical passion is the intermediate stage. It is historically plain, because his pastoral drama "Aminta," in which these qualities I have dwelt on are shown free from any epic entanglement, was the beginning of pastoral drama in Italy, — that is, it ushered in Italian opera. Tasso, by virtue of this possession of his genius by emotion for its own sake, is the forerunner and prophet of the age of music soon to dawn after him, and in the coming of which he assisted.

You will observe that Tasso exemplifies with singular precision the main principles that were laid down with respect to the general nature of poetic energy. Though he was a scholar from boyhood and steeped in the academic learning of his time, and master of the earlier tradition of literature ancient and modern, and was so expert with his mind that he could, like Pope, compose in his teens a work seemingly mature and excellent enough to make him at once, like Byron, and younger than Byron, the best poet of his time, nevertheless, it was not by this weight and compass of learning nor by anything intellectual that his genius succeeded; but it was by his power of emotion. Emotion is found to be, in a singularly pure form, the substance of his epic, its centre of interest, its core from which its power radiates. Secondly, though by the traits of his epic, its classical and romantic handling, its relation to luxury and the arts, its piety, and much else both in structure and detail, he belongs to the Renaissance, and the great emotional upheaval due to that rebirth of the soul and senses of man, and is in fact

the last child of that age in his own land, and hence is to be counted in that group, nevertheless, he is also a forward-looking man, and announces the new and approaching age of music. In the most intimate and personal part of his genius he deals with emotion as it is under the condition of music, and attempts in poetry the characteristic effects of music, endeavoring to realize emotion for its own sake. He is thus in his genius prescient of the change of the mood in the race, and attaches himself to a modern time by the link of the opera and by the use of his imagination, specially in the highly artificial forms of the pastoral and of magic; that is, he frees himself as much as possible from realism in the scene, and disengages emotion from actuality in the manner of the opera. It is unfortunate for his fame that he thus stood, as it were, between two arts, poetry and music. Among epic poets, he professed to fear only Camoens, of his contemporaries; his inferiority to the greatest, such as Homer and Virgil, is obvious, and in majesty he falls short compared with Milton; he cannot be ranked among the greatest poets

in epic verse. The reason appears to be that in his martial verse he follows a literary tradition and is at best doing by main force what others had done; while in his emotional verse he is experimenting in a kind of art which reaches perfection rather in music than in poetry. He was too late for martial epic; he was too early for musical emotion; but his genius foreknows the moods of music. Thirdly, his genius is greatest and most efficient in proportion as it is unconscious of itself in its art. That part of his work which was intellectually and consciously determined was the martial part, the structure of the action and placing of the episodes, the imitations of his predecessors, — all, in brief, that he derived from the classical and romantic tradition, from books. If he had done only this, he would have written only a respectable poem, like a hundred others, which would have soon been forgotten or listed only in the history of his country's literature. What he added out of his own heart, — the poetry of love ensphered in landscape, melody, pathos, sentiment, sensuousness, — and seized most intimately

and passionately in the form of an inexpressible longing without issue, — all this was the flowering of the unconscious, the original part of him, — that which was least indebted for subject or method to other men and former poets. The primacy of emotion, the prescience of the future, the guiding and prevailing power of the unconscious element in his genius are clearly seen.

The characteristic marks are just as plainly to be seen in his personal temperament and worldly fortunes. A precocious boy, he had extraordinary sensitiveness and extraordinary creative faculty, and under the excitement of a fevered and unhappy life his senses blended with his creative faculty and made him a visionary, — the victim of his faculties. He was a courtier and a scholar, and both are careers naturally subject to annoying jealousies, to envy and detraction and intrigue; he had no power of wise conduct in unhappy circumstances, and his long and miserable imprisonment in the flower of his manhood was the result; yet in his life he was much honored and befriended in general; his fame, which he highly valued, was always

a solace to him. Looking beneath the obvious facts, however, it appears to me that one reads an old and familiar tragedy of life. He was from birth a man framed for the natural enjoyment of life, and especially for its æsthetic enjoyment; he was a man to whom beauty and delight appealed in the most noble, sweet, and penetrating way, and his original sensitiveness was developed to the full by high cultivation. Two barriers, nevertheless, rose between him and life. He loved a princess, not of his own world, and consequently he was filled with that ideal passion which is the tradition of Italian poetry and which is full of sentiment, of unrealized emotion. Secondly, he was trained by the Jesuit fathers, in charge of his boyhood, to an ascetic habit and view, and to a fear of displeasing heaven; and, as time went on, this element in him, which always fought with his poetic impulses and power, made him cancel the best of his verse. In these two ways his natural enjoyment of life was blocked. He responded to the call of life with his senses and imagination; we read his true nature, in this way, by the charm of the

things he loved. Yet, under the conditions, it is not strange that the main impression left by his poetry is that here is written the despair of a heart in love with life. It is this despair that gives such poignancy to his pathos, such melancholy to the verse, and such yearning force to his lyrical cry of the beauty, the joy, and the extinction of life.

VII

LUCRETIVS

LAST year, in my wanderings through Sicily, I came to the old town that was once Acragas, and I had the happiness to abide there quietly for a while, where so long ago between the sea and the mountains stood what Pindar called "the most beautiful city of mortals." I remember I would go down to the ruins, where, in the midst of immense broken columns, lay on the ground a great stone figure of a Titan, with his face looking to the broad, empty blue sky; and it seemed to me like an unwritten poem of Victor Hugo, as if the Titan in a sort of triumph lay there on his back in the centre of the fallen temple of Zeus, his foe and oppressor, and looked up with a stony, sardonic satisfaction into the now throneless ether. It was a Mediterranean mood. And often,

wandering about through the region, I remembered that sage of antiquity, who is to us hardly more than a sounding name, Empedocles, — about whom you may recall Arnold wrote a poem “Empedocles on Etna,” — who was for all time the chief glory of Acragas. He was a poet and priest, a man of science and affairs; even — as he said — powerful in magic, almost with divine power, so excelling both to himself and the citizens seemed his faculty. He occupied himself with great works of public utility, using novel means; he opened a path for the north wind through the hills in order to shield the city from the heats of summer; he turned the bed of a river, and poured it through a vast marsh and so drove the pestilence away forever; he raised a woman from seeming death by his medicinal art; and it is little wonder, in those days, that when he came forth, being a noble of the state, tall, clad in purple robes and with long streaming hair, and walking in golden sandals, attended by his retinue of followers, the people saluted him with such reverence as is akin to religious awe; such honor, let

us say, as was paid to holy men in mediæval cities. Often I thought of him, and wondered how it could have been, — so impossible and remote seemed the picture in that denuded plain; and I remembered the words of Lucretius, whose enthusiasm for great minds is one of his engaging qualities, in which he laid his laurel on the memory of Empedocles, whose genius was kindred to his own: —

“Him within the three-cornered shores of its lands that island bore, about which the Ionian sea flows in large cranklings, and splashes up brine from its green waves. Here the sea racing in its straitened firth, divides by its waters the shores of Italia’s lands from the other’s coasts; here is wasteful Charybdis, and here the rumblings of Etna. . . . Now, though this great country is seen to deserve in many ways the wonder of mankind and is held to be well worth visiting, rich in all good things, guarded by large force of men, yet seems it to have held within it nothing more glorious than this man.”

With the same lonely grandeur that

Empedocles bore to Lucretius, with the same solitary preëminence, Lucretius stands forth to my eyes from Roman time, which “seems to have held within it nothing more glorious than this man.” I may not be able to carry you along with me in this enthusiasm; for the subject is difficult, the matter of his poem is hard and dry, unintelligible indeed to a modern reader without special preparation to understand it; and yet, though time has thus petrified large portions of it, the poem burns with a far deeper vigor than flows in the poets whose fiery genius I have hitherto tried to interpret to you. It is the passion not of the blood, but of the mind; not for a nation’s glory like Camoens, but for the welfare of man’s race; not issuing in despair like Byron and Tasso, but in the control of life. It is the intellectual passion to serve mankind in the ways of knowledge.

Just as poetic genius is often a double star, — as Shakspeare was both poet and dramatist, and as Plato was both poet and philosopher, and the poetic element was primary in both of them, — so Lucretius was a poet and a man of science, and the poetic element was

primary in him. The subject-matter of his work is science, a theory of physics, explanations of natural phenomena, astronomy, — that is, the science of the ancient world. For the most part, as science, it is in matters of detail now merely curious reading, useful in reminding us that science as well as religion has a history of early fables and a past littered with errors; but that is all. Personally, I find something refreshing in coming in contact with this childhood of science, just as one finds it in those passages of Plato where he treats incidentally of similiar subjects; and it makes for intellectual modesty, when one comes upon these provinces of ignorance in the serious works of the great, for even in our own culture may there not be just such childhood tracts, as they will seem hereafter? But a better reason why the old sages of Greece, like Empedocles, interest me is that there I feel myself, more clearly than elsewhere, at the very birth of that Greek reason, in whose advent lay, as it seems to me, — I do not say eternal salvation, — but the salvation of our race here on earth. I like to read such passages of

these old poems as express man's first sense, not of the difficulty of virtue, but of the quite as important difficulty of knowledge. It sometimes seems to us that the early Greek sages were overweening, — indeed the very types of omniscient self-conceit; but this is partly because of the universality of their theories, and partly it is the after-effect of Socrates' sarcasm upon our minds. Hear what Empedocles said, four centuries before Lucretius: —

“Weak and narrow are the powers implanted in the limbs of men; many the woes that fall on them and blunt the edge of thought; short is the measure of the life in death through which they toil; then are they borne away, like smoke they vanish into air, and what they dream they know is but the little each hath stumbled on, in wandering about the world. Yet boast they all that they have learned the whole. Vain fools! for what *that* is no eye hath seen, no ear hath heard, nor can it be conceived by mind of man. Thou, then, since thou hast fallen to this place, shalt know no more than human wisdom may attain.”

Lucretius, however, is little embarrassed by any doubts of the amount and kind of his knowledge; and as one reads his explanation of specific natural phenomena, given out with such assurance, one is reminded of that tone of knowingness still familiar to us in the eager and plausible scientist. But to leave on one side this detail, which is as compact of error as the lives of the saints, there are certain conceptions and ideas of a more general nature which will give us a more favorable and just notion of Lucretius' true attainment in a scientific grasp of the world. These ideas are simple and few; but to estimate them justly it must be remembered on what a background they are relieved, how recent was any natural knowledge, how close was the world of the primitive mind, how small that world was, how near the gods were in it, scarce a hand-breadth off, — how Lucretius himself lived in a Mediterranean world seething with idolatries; it is against the barbarian inheritance of paganism, against its Egyptian mysticism, its magical practices, its long-consecrated ceremonial rites, — in a word, against the pagan attitude

to nature that these ideas stand forth; and in them slowly forming was the creation of a new world, the world of thought in which we now live.

In the first place, in room of that small Olympian or Nilotic world where the gods were near, he conceived of infinite space, thronged with systems of worlds, universes like our own. It is hard for us to think rightly of the sequent steps of man's progress, to realize, for example, the epoch-making change of such a thing as the discovery of the ways to work metals, or of cultivation of the olive and of corn, or of the alphabet. Now we think of the epoch of the expansion of the mind as being coincident, say, with the substitution of Copernican for Ptolemaic astronomy; but when the idea of infinite space was first intelligently conceived so that the man knew what he was thinking, that was the moment of expansion to which all others are dwindling points; that was a sublime moment in the history of man's mind, though since such knowledge was not so readily transmissible as a material discovery, like the culture of corn, the effects

of the act are more slowly apparent. The thought of infinity was old when Lucretius received it; but it must not be considered that the infinity of the universe was the same to him as to us. He believed, for example, that the sun and moon and stars actually are of the size that they appear to us to be; and he filled space with systems conceived on that pattern. Nevertheless, he had acquired for his thought a scale of infinity; and it gave to his conception of things a sublimity not unlike that which the same scale gives Milton in "Paradise Lost."

Secondly, he conceived of nature as an energy existing in this infinite, and infinite itself; and in the analysis of energy he found the other pole of thought, the infinitesimal, the atomic; for all matter is composed of the atoms, infinite in number, and themselves imperceptible to the senses. In other words, he conceived of nature, on modern lines, as an unseen energy, — the unseen universe, as we sometimes call it, — the microscopic, the molecular, the ethereal wave of force, however constituted, which is invisible, but out of which in combination the visible world

of nature emerges to our gross senses. The world of nature was thus to him, essentially, a world of the mind's eye; the veil of sense had fallen, and he saw what was behind. This theory he derived, as he did all his knowledge, from the Greeks, those few lonely thinkers who were the light of that early world. The idea itself, however, was a great achievement of thought, and one of the most fruitful legacies that the antique world transmitted to us.

Thirdly, he conceived of energy as organized; the atoms were different in kind, and limited in the number of kinds, and by their combination formed various species of things, as we may call them, and these species were fixed, so that a certain combination produced one species only, and if that species had in itself the power of reproduction, it reproduced only its own species. Everything thus, he said, has "its limit and deep-set boundary mark." This clearly is nature organized. Fourthly, he conceived of energy as a flux, an element of change, an incessant action and transformation of the atomic groups dissolving and recombining,

which is the process of nature. Fifthly, he conceived of energy as perfectly conserved in this process; there is neither loss nor addition; the sum remains always constant. Sixthly, he conceived of energy as absolutely law-abiding, subject neither to interference nor caprice nor default, unchangeable in its certainty. It is, perhaps, by the strength with which he grasped this idea of the invariable order of natural law that he most affects the admiration of modern times, partly because of the intensity of feeling with which he clings to it; it is the anchor of his faith. To sum it up, Lucretius conceived nature as an unseen, organizing, ceaselessly active, perfectly conserved, and law-abiding energy, working in infinite space and itself infinite. This is not unlike the scientific idea that we know.

To turn to the history of the universe, it appeared to Lucretius that in the ceaseless action of infinite atoms in infinite space sooner or later there would arise the particular combination from which the world phenomena known to man followed. He did not believe that the world was very old,

and he thought the history of man quite recent. There is in his physical theory a rude doctrine of evolution, of the centring of the sun and moon and the solidifying of the earth; and man arising out of nature, with other species of things, was half-beast, savage and rough and pitiable, and was gradually by his own efforts civilized. He notices the extinction of species in the conflict for life, and he assigns to the softening influence of children a great share in raising man from the savage and brutal state. Some of you may remember that John Fiske was believed to have added an original contribution to the doctrine of evolution by the influence he assigned to the prolongation of the period of infancy. It is a curious parallel. But it is enough to say that in his theory of the origin of civilization, language, the arts, and all that concerns the primitive history of mankind, Lucretius is quite in harmony with modern thought, even to the analysis of the influence of dreams in generating some important human conceptions with regard to the soul. As he thought that the life of mankind and of our universe had

not been long, he also believed that the world had grown, even in that time, old, and was losing its strength; his mind was prepossessed with the idea of the dissolution of things as the natural term of all combinations of atoms, and it is a curious sign of the sense of insecurity then belonging to the human mind to find him thinking that the world as we know it would end in a catastrophe, which he apparently anticipated as likely to occur at any moment, when the frame of things should fall in and the atomic storm fly dispersed abroad. Such in brief is the view of the world which Lucretius presents.

It is not, however, the science of Lucretius that interests me; it is incidental to my main purpose, which is rather to set forth the poet. Yet it was science which gave to Lucretius the ample career of his mind. He was excited and enfranchised by it, and in these ideas he seemed to have received, as it were, the freedom of the universe, to go fearless and unquestioned where he would, as he describes his master, Epicurus, who, he says, "traversed throughout in mind and spirit the immeasurable universe, whence he

returns a conqueror to tell us what can, what cannot come into being, — on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deep-set boundary mark." Lucretius had reached in these conceptions the seats of the wise, which he describes in a famous passage:—

"It is sweet, when on the great sea the winds trouble its waters, to behold from land another's deep distress; not that it is a pleasure and delight that any should be afflicted, but because it is sweet to see from what evils you are yourself exempt. It is sweet also to look upon the mighty struggles of war arrayed along the plains without sharing yourself in the danger. But nothing is more welcome than to hold the lofty and serene positions well fortified by the learning of the wise, from which you may look down upon others and see them wandering all abroad and going astray in their search for the path of life, see the contest among them of intellect, the rivalry of birth, the striving night and day with surpassing effort to struggle up to the summit of power and be masters of the world. O miserable minds of men! O blinded breasts!"

It is from such a height that Lucretius is always seen looking down. For he had about him the horizons and perspectives of a new world. In another famous and peculiarly Roman passage he says: "When mighty legions fill the plain with their rapid movement, raising the pageantry of warfare, the splendor rises up to heaven, and all the land about is bright with the glitter of brass, and beneath from the mighty host of men the sound of their tramp arises, and the mountains, struck by their shouting, reëcho their voices to the stars of heaven, and the horsemen hurry to and fro on either flank and suddenly charge across the plains, shaking them with their impetuous onset. . . . And yet there is some place in the lofty mountains whence they appear to be all still, and to rest as a bright gleam upon the plains."

This is the new perspective from which Lucretius looks on human life. He was the only Roman who transcended Rome. He sees Rome itself as but one of the swift runners who hand on in turn the torch of life among the nations. He was a Roman, and of an ancient house; but he despised alike

imperial power and vastness of wealth. Rome spread material dominion over the earth, but he saw only the dominion of the mind as a thing worthy of man's dignity. Rome subjected men in their bodies, but his passion was to enfranchise the souls of men and bring them to a birth of freedom. For Lucretius was deeply endowed with that social sympathy which belongs to poetry by its own nature, as I have said; and the main motive of his poem was not knowledge, not the scholar's motive, but was service, the poet's function. It was not for science that he deeply cared, but for its effects on the minds of men.

He looked abroad over human life, and he often depicts it in the large; he sees it without a veil and tells it without a lie; there is no golden age in man's past for him, — only the bestial misery and blood-stained cruelty of savage life from which man rises with vast effort and suffering; or, he shows, as at the end of the poem, the plague at Athens, a terrible scene of human wretchedness; or, he singles out of the high luxurious life of the age the Roman noble, — “driving

his horses, he speeds in hot haste to his country house, as if his house were on fire and he was hurrying to bring assistance. Straightway he begins to yawn, so soon as he has reached his threshold, or sinks heavily into sleep, or even with all haste returns to the city." It is the picture of speeding wealth in our own day. Lucretius renders life as he sees it, in its past and present; and his words are blended of irony, reproof, and sorrow. He had broad and natural sympathies; and his sympathy, though not lacking in individual touches, is nevertheless mainly impersonal and racial; it is for the race rather than the man that he has pity and commiseration. That is why he wrote his poem of which the aim is not scientific but philanthropic. He saw mankind under the yoke of superstition; the critics say that he exaggerated the terrors of the supernatural, which did not so afflict men in paganism. I am not competent to gainsay their opinion, yet my own mind refuses to see the Mediterranean world of those ages other than as he described it, — permeated with superstitious fear and barren pagan practices through all

its million-peopled coasts; so, at any rate, it seemed to him, and he lifted his hand to wither this immeasurable evil, the chief and fruitful source of men's woes, at the root. It is at superstition, as at the old dragon, that every glittering shaft of reason is shot in these golden lines.

Lucretius identified all religion with superstition, and meant to uproot it from the minds of men and entirely eradicate it. He opposed in sharp contrast the pagan view of the world, under which man and nature were the sport of the gods, and the view of Greek reason in which the divine element in every form was excluded both from nature and human life. The state of man as Lucretius saw it, under paganism, was one of servitude to fear; under this idea of the Greek reason it was one of freedom, of dignity, and at its worst estate one of noble fortitude and self-respect. He desired to establish this reign of reason, in place of paganism, and to follow in the footsteps of his master, Epicurus, who had opened the way and brought this light into the world. At the outset of his poem he describes this

achievement of Epicurus and what it meant for mankind: —

“When human life lay foully prostrate upon earth, crushed down under the weight of religion, who showed her head from the quarters of heaven with hideous aspect lowering upon mortals, a man of Greece ventured first to lift up his mortal eyes to her face and first to withstand her to her face. Him neither story of gods nor thunderbolts nor heaven with threatening roar could quell; they only chafed the more the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the fast bars of nature’s portals. Therefore the living force of his soul gained the day; on he passed far beyond the flaming walls of the world and traversed throughout, in mind and spirit, the immeasurable universe. . . . Us his victory brings level with heaven.”

It is always a great moment when mankind looks at its gods with level eyes; and, in this case, the gods seemed to Lucretius to vanish and remove far away. He believed that these gods that men worshipped with altars and sacred rites over the whole earth,

and honored with festal days, were the coinage of man's brain, and man had placed them in heaven and given them charge of all things:—

“O hapless race of men, when that they charged the gods with such acts, and coupled with them bitter wrath! what groanings did they then beget for themselves, what wounds for us, what tears for our children's children! No act is it of piety to be often seen with veiled head to turn to a stone and approach every altar and fall prostrate on the ground and spread out the palms before the statues of the gods and sprinkle the altars with much blood of beasts and link vow on vow, but rather to be able to look on all things with a mind at peace.”

Nor, says Lucretius, in his opening lines, should any fear that the ground of reason is unholy and her path the path of sin; rather it is religion that is sinful. And he goes on to draw that picture of the human sacrifice of Iphigeneia by Agamemnon, her father, when the Greek ships crossed to Troy, as a capital instance of the evil to which religion inclines the hearts of men. He puts this

picture in the forefront of his poem as a landmark of its thought; it was from such monstrous acts, and the mood which is their parent, that life could be freed; in other words, the capital thought of the poem is that life must purify itself. For Lucretius looked on life as not so much wretched because of external calamity visited upon man, but because of those woes to which his own will consents and in which it is by folly or fear an accomplice; religion in particular was something of which man could rid his bosom, since it was born of it. To this end, then, Lucretius strove; it is with passion that he pleads the cause, and it is this passion which underlies the intellectual vigor of the panorama of nature in her acts and scenes which he unfolds, and also the profound moral sympathy with which he displays the human lot under nature's dispensation. It is, therefore, not exposition but persuasion that he has in view, and for this reason he inlays the verse with pictures, in the old way,—Gray's way,—and puts truth forth as poetry.

His procedure is easily understood. "This terror, then," he says, "and darkness of

mind must be dispelled not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by the aspect and the law of nature." He excludes the gods from dominion over nature on the ground that the universe is infinite and command of it is beyond their power. Man's conception of the world had outgrown his conception of the gods. "Who can order the infinite mass? who can hold with a guiding hand the mighty reins of immensity?" Lucretius says. And again he excludes intelligence from nature on the ground of the imperfection of the world; it is obviously not the work of intelligence. Intelligence belongs to man alone; it is the accident of his being, and will vanish from the universe with him. We are not concerned with the truth of the statement, but with the fact. What a step it was, what a power it showed in man to change his mind! What a masterly reversal of the point of view this is, in comparison with that universal habit of old time which projected human life into all things and gave the early peoples over to animism, polytheism, and all the subtler forms of anthropomorphic thought as it fades away in philosophy and

metaphysics. It is by just such reversals of universal past beliefs that the progress of reason is marked.

1 All this argument against the gods proceeds, you observe, not on moral but on intellectual grounds; that is, it is a characteristically Greek mode of thought. The citadel of superstition, however, in Lucretius' eyes was rather in the fear of something after death than in the presence of the gods in this life and the world of nature. He met this fear by the simplest mode of attack, and denied the immortality of the soul. It is not necessary to go into his argument. To me the most remarkable thing about it is not the argument nor the belief itself, but the grave and almost tender considerateness with which Lucretius tries to reconcile men to this belief, — it is almost as if he were talking to children, with a gentle but firm insistence, and with entire understanding of their disturbed fears and sympathy with them, but, nevertheless, if they will listen, the fact is not only really so, but best, a blessing, the greatest blessing that can come to heal the wounds of men and give them peace. This lulling tone in the argu-

ment always reminds me of the persuasive melody of the verses in the "Faery Queen," where Despair wooes the knight to self-destruction. In no part of the poem is Lucretius more vividly in sympathy with life in its natural happiness. "Soon," he says, "shall thy home receive thee no more with glad welcome, nor thy true wife, nor thy dear children run to snatch the first kiss, touching thy heart with silent gladness." Nowhere is he more gravely eloquent: "Death, therefore, to us is nothing; . . . and as in time gone by we felt no distress when the Carthaginians from all sides came together to do battle, and all things shaken by war's troublous uproar shuddered and quaked beneath high heaven, and mortal men were in doubt which of the two peoples it should be to whose empire all must fall by sea and land . . . thus when we shall be no more . . . nothing whatever can happen to excite sensation, not if earth shall be mingled with sea, and sea with heaven." Nowhere does he speak with more dignity, like a Roman: "Why not, then, take thy departure like a guest filled with life, — and with resignation, thou fool, enter upon untroubled rest?"

“Now resign all things unsuited to thy age, and with a good grace up and greatly go: thou must.” “Even worthy Ancus has quitted the light, . . . the son of the Scipios, thunderbolt of war, terror of Carthage, yielded his bones to earth just as if he were the lowest menial. . . . Even Epicurus passed away when his light of life had run its course, he who surpassed in intellect the race of man. . . . Wilt thou then hesitate, and think it a hardship to die? . . . None the less will that everlasting death await you. . . . Thus it is that all no less than thou have before this come to an end, and hereafter will come to an end; . . . and life is granted to none in fee-simple, but to all in usufruct.”

Such are some of the passages in which Lucretius, like a patient but high-minded teacher, endeavors to reconcile the minds of men to their good. For in his eyes to escape from the evil, whose bondage is a state of supernatural fear, is to find the door of life itself, — the door of that life still possible to men which, he says, though on earth, may be a life “not unworthy of the gods.”

For when Lucretius had excluded divine power from the constitution and government of nature, — and he goes on to show that all events are merely natural phenomena, — and when he had quieted the fear of something after death by denying immortality to the soul, he had, nevertheless, performed only the negative part of his task. He had, besides, to build up an ideal of wise life under such conditions. The view that great poets take of human life is never very rose-colored; and Lucretius is no exception to the rule. The picture that he gives of the child at birth is very famous: “The babe, like a sailor cast ashore by the cruel waves, lies naked on the ground, speechless, in need of every aid to life, when first nature has cast him forth by great throes from his mother’s womb; and he fills the air with his piteous wail, as befits one whose doom it is to pass through so much misery in life.” Human nature itself is very imperfect; it is, says Lucretius, like a leaky vessel that will not retain even the blessings that are poured into it, and moreover it vitiates these goods inwardly by a certain taint and nauseous flavor, as it were, pro-

ceeding from itself. The discovery of wisdom that could in any way remedy these objects seems to Lucretius a marvellous action: "a god he was," he says, "a god who first found out that plan of life which is now termed wisdom." It was a more divine gift than corn or wine, for life could go on without these; but "a happy life was not possible without a clean breast." The deeds of Hercules were nothing in comparison. "The earth even now abounds in wild beasts and is filled with troublous terror throughout woods and great mountains and deep forests; places which we have it for the most part in our power to shun. But unless the breast is cleared, what battles and dangers must then find their way into us in our own despite!" What cares, what fears! — and pride, lust, and wantonness, what disasters they occasion! and luxury and sloth! "He therefore who shall have subdued all these and banished them from the mind by words, not arms, shall he not have a just title to be ranked among the gods?" It is a Roman who is thus exalting the victories of peace over those of war, and of reason over arms. He

builds then his ideal of a life, content with little, free from lust for political power or riches or pleasures, strong in natural affections and in the reasonable satisfaction of our needs, and with power, if not to escape calamity, at least by fortitude to blunt the edge of evil. To learn this wisdom is the best use of life in the brief interval that life shall be ours.

Such, in rough outlines, is the teaching of Lucretius. He does not deny the existence of the divine gods; but they live remote from man, like him a part of nature in their own mode of existence, and to be careless of mankind is a part of their blessedness. It would be easy to appear to find in that principle of energy, that vigor which is nature, whose force is in the coming of spring and the gladness of cattle and in the thoughts of men, which is the inspiration of this poem in Lucretius also, as he says, — it would be easy to find in this something like a divine principle diffusing itself in life; but it is not so presented by Lucretius. He excluded from life every thought of what is to our minds religion and the immortal soul; and did it as a

bringer of intellectual truth in the interest of man's earthly happiness. It is, perhaps, hard for us to realize that he seemed to himself in all this a benefactor of his race. Yet, if we remember justly the pagan world, or even if we recall the vast reign of religious superstition over mankind still throughout the world and realize what it is, if we remember how much of superstition still persists even in the purer forms of religion, and to how great evils religion has inclined men's minds in the centuries since Lucretius wrote, —if we keep something of all this in our minds, we may better measure the hopes of this early thinker who first seized hold of the truths of science and the dominion of the pure reason over men's minds as if there were in it the coming of a new and happier age.

Lucretius was not so much prescient of that new age as living in it. The sense of being a discoverer in a new land is one of the most vivid traits in his mind. "I traverse," he says, "the pathless haunts never yet trodden by the foot of man. I love to approach the untasted springs and to quaff, I love to cull fresh flowers and gather for my

head a crown from spots whence the Muses have yet veiled the brows of none,—because I teach of great things—things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.” He has this mark of the poetic faculty—its forward-looking gaze, its atmosphere of the virgin peak and the new-breaking morning. He has also the mark of passion,—intense, overwhelming, absorbing,—the passion of the intellect for truth and of the heart for service to his race. He has the mark of the social bond, which belongs to genius. He stands, moreover, at that line of fracture in the thoughts of men which does not belong to any one age, like the Renaissance, but is the slowest of the great social changes,—the line which marks the rise of reason in the government of man’s thoughts. It is only in our own time that Lucretius has been esteemed according to the true measure of his greatness. But what a far-sighted and firm-fixed genius that was which could wait eighteen centuries for its true fame,—it seems like one of those great suns of outer space whose light requires such length of years to reach the eyes of men. There is this loneliness of intellectual splen-

dor, in Lucretius, — this quality of solitariness in his genius, which I began by speaking of. I know that Virgil was a greater poet, and revere him above all other poets, but in thinking of Lucretius only the old words rise to my lips — “This was the noblest Roman of them all.”

VIII

INSPIRATION

YOU will, perhaps, remember that in opening this course a few general principles were suggested with regard to the nature of poetic power, and from time to time I have directed your attention to the presence of some of these principles in the six poets whose genius we have examined. Poetic energy was defined as, in essence, shared and controlled emotion; in its being shared emotion lies its social principle; in its being controlled emotion lies its artistic principle. I have dwelt less, however, on these two subsidiary aspects, and have sought rather to bring out clearly the primary fact that emotion is the base of poetry, and that capacity for it is the radical power of genius, and that the poetic life so led is naturally one of unrest and misfortune. In Marlowe the emotion was an

aspiration of all the faculties, the individual making out toward the infinite in all ways; in Camoens it was emotion closely joined with action in a national epic; in Tasso it was emotion disjoined from action and tending to the condition of music; in Byron it was emotion of the heart; in Lucretius it was emotion of the intellect. It was noticed, too, in accordance with the general principle that great literatures arise along the lines of fracture in human progress, that Marlowe was the child of the Renaissance in England, that Camoens was the poet of world-discovery, that Byron was the star of the revolutionary spirit on the Continent, and Tasso foretold the age of music, and Lucretius stood in the dawn of scientific reason; each occupied a point of vantage, and was, as it were, a mountain crag that caught and flashed on a moment of morning light. Each represented some mood of the world at a culminating point, and with intensity.

The prevailing trait of the poetic temperament in action — its free and lawless nature — has also been exemplified. These poets have left upon our minds, I am persuaded, a

sense of their extraordinary vital power, of their strange difference from men in general, and of something that awes us in their genius as if a miraculous element entered into it. [The sense of the mystery of spiritual power is felt in connection with these men. It is under the influence of such thoughts as these that men speak of poetic energy as an inspiration; they convey thus their sense that the faculty is something "above man," that it partakes of the mystery of all power in the universe, that it is kindred with what they call the divine. Something, — they know not what, — but something greater than the man speaks through the man, and there is a virtue in his works that his own unaided power never placed there. I think I describe the feeling fairly in these words. Inspiration is a natural conviction of men with respect to poetry; and to the greater poets themselves it is as natural, for their own works and their states of mind in composing seem beyond and above themselves. This sense of possession, of being caught up into a sphere of greater power, is the true poetic madness, which is so familiar an idea in Greek thought, and is not

yet extinct. I have thought it appropriate to close this various survey of the poets with some final remarks on this old mystery, so ineradicable; not with any idea of solving it at all, but merely to offer some few considerations with regard to it, which have occurred to me from time to time. Let us return, therefore, to that gulf which we found in the first lecture between the primitive dancing and singing horde and the divine poet, and look more closely at the phenomena.

It has been said that "the mental condition of the lower races is the key to poetry"; and you may recall that I defined the poet as "under excitement presenting the phenomenon of a highly developed mind working in a primitive way." Primitive psychology is a subject beyond my ken; but there are a few obvious facts that a modern reader can hardly escape. You will remember that in the dance of the primitive horde the rhythm is very simple, and the cry is perhaps one sound, interminably repeated. Monotony is, in fact, characteristic of primitive life. The repetition has certain uses easily seen. In all thought of primitive conditions it is hardly

possible for us to exaggerate the feebleness of the human mind in its emergence from brute conditions. The first use of monotonous repetition is to fasten attention, a difficult thing for the savage mind; power of memory, the power of brain-cells to retain the mental image of a thing or an event, must have been greatly indebted to such a monotonous habit. Again, the repetition assists in labor: songs of labor are not a relaxation but an aid; the Egyptian workmen sing when they are tired; again, the well-known law that every mental idea of an action tends to realize itself in that action is sufficient to account for one definite utility there is in the repeated utterance of such a word as "strike," say, in rhythm before each blow. On the passive side, also, it will be readily understood that monotone has an hypnotic and preparatory influence on the mind. Indeed the monotone may be the basis, the exciting cause, or nervous predisposition of the wild passion which breaks forth and possesses the participants in the dance. Any of you who have ever witnessed such performances must have been struck by the singular coexistence in

them of monotone and of excitement; the two are linked together, — wild excitement such as we never dream of, together with monotony so insistent and prolonged as to seem incredible. I have never heard Tennyson read, but I have heard his reading precisely imitated, and I was struck in it by the same combination, — namely, that as the passion grew, the chanted monotony of the lines stood out more rigidly. It has been noticed, too, that poets naturally thus chant their lines. Wordsworth did so, and I have heard his reading also imitated with precision. These two elements, monotony and excitement, are faithfully reflected in the Mohammedan religion, which is near to primitive habits in all ways. Thus in the several sects of North Africa one is distinguished from another in various ways, and among others by the formula or verse which is repeated by each member a certain number of times daily. Thus the brotherhood of Abd-er-Rahman must recite their formula, seven words, three thousand times a day; the Tsidjani must pray at morning the two words “God pardon” two hundred times, followed

by a longer prayer one hundred times repeated, and then one hundred times the formula of seven words. At three o'clock in the afternoon are other similar prayers, and at sunset the same as at morning. In Moslem mosques I have myself sometimes taken the beads from the priest and repeated the formulas as I wandered about, to see what it was like to live that way. On the other hand, in the dervish dances the element of excitement in combination with monotony is easily observed. It appears, therefore, that while for us monotony destroys interest and puts us to sleep, under other conditions it is the ground of the highest excitement.

I have a theory — whether I have read it or dreamed it I do not know — that the emergence of man from the brute-stage of life was accompanied by an immense outburst and increase of emotional power. If it were so, the emotion was of this kind; and, without regard to the scientific ground of the theory, it appears to me *prima facie* plausible to this degree, that such emotion was a main condition of the gradual advent of intellectual life.

If we remember how weak and unstable then were all mental phenomena, still perhaps more like waking dreams than what we know as continuous and organized mental life, and if we remember also the power of emotion to vivify the mental processes, it is plain that minds so stirred would grow and would store power beyond other minds. The phenomenon would be only what is our well-known experience taking place in a lower plane of being. Excitement increases the speed and power of the mind; the use of stimulants affords such excitement, and when the excitement arises naturally through the emotions, the effect is the same. The state so induced, whether naturally or artificially, does not differ in kind from that of inspiration, — that is, a power above the normal from which the subject of it recedes when the mood is gone. Emotion, however induced, discharges itself according to the constitution of the man who feels it; and in primitive life it would discharge itself in this one or that one wildly, wastefully, spasmodically, perhaps, and in brains of a finer or stronger quality in another way, that is, along directions of thought.

The most active brains would be those most capable of emotion.

If emotion played such a part in generating intelligence, it becomes easier to understand the respect paid in all primitive times to those who are described as madmen, and to all who were subject to exalted psychical states from whatever cause; and the impulse which led men to cultivate, as it were, the trance state by artificial or semi-artificial means, which is found in all religions, would seem more normal. Certain it is that about the ancient oracles there gathered intellectual and moral power, and even as at Delphi great guiding power; they were very old places of immemorial inspiration, in all its defined religious forms, its trances, and ecstasies as well as other kinds of soothsaying; they were, in a certain sense, the seats of truth most revered. For the oracles were not places of fraud; fraud entered into and combined with original beliefs and practices, as it has in other religions without number, but only in their decay. Originally the oracles were sincere facts of religion as it then was. There were other concurring causes for their

religious primacy; but it seems not unlikely that the power of emotional excitement to unlock and speed intelligence may have been one element of real utility in the phenomenon. Facts of disease, of the action of vapors, of psychical states and susceptibilities that are still obscure, were no doubt involved in the entire primitive attitude to the divine madness; but in the midst of all there remains one thread of sense and reality in the normal power of excitement to set the intellectual powers in uncommon action.

It is also to be observed that monotony characterizes the primitive mind in another way than has been noticed; no community is so bound in convention, tradition, and routine as the savage horde; just as in the lower organizations of life, the ways of doing once found are fossilized in invariable paths of instinct, as in the bees and ants, so in the primitive horde ways of behavior once established became conventionalized with a rigor that tyranny could never equal. The great difficulty to-day with the primitive African people is to persuade them to do other or different from their fathers. In the

primitive horde every one conformed, and especially after supersitious religion began to prevail; that is, every one conformed except the madman, — and there could be but one explanation of such a man, he was a sacred person, in some way touched with that power, which, whether it was dæmonic or divine, was pretty much one to the savage mind. Thus primitive man regarded these various phenomena, ranging from the ordinary type of insanity up to the priestess of the temple, as belonging in the region of inspiration, of that power above man which made of them persons apart; and this mood toward them persisted through ages and far into high civilizations. The easy old-fashioned way was to look on all this primitive and pagan belief as merely a structure of superstition and fraud; but this is no longer possible. And it seems to me, speaking speculatively and not dogmatically, that in this universal belief and long adherence to it we may perhaps discern some historic traces of the great function of emotion, as an evolutionary element, in disengaging and freeing and establishing the intellectual powers of the race.

Let us turn now to the phenomena as they appear in the field of civilization. There we see, as in Greece, men under excitement producing poems, dramas, and other works at moments of exaltation; and their state was described by observers and by themselves as one of poetic madness. It was a theory universally received. What is it that had happened? It seems to be no more than in other cases of excitement, except for a peculiarity in the manner of the discharge of the emotion. Let me recur to the distinction which was alluded to in the first lecture between the power of Dionysus and the power of Apollo, made by the brilliant and unfortunate German writer, Frédéric Nietzsche, in an essay of his youth upon Greek tragedy at a time when he was dominated by enthusiasm for Wagner's music. He divided poetry between the two: to Apollo he ascribed the intellectual part, the dream, the perceptive faculty, the idea as it is known to consciousness, the phenomenal; to Dionysus he gave the intoxication, the self-destruction or renunciation of consciousness, the revel of emotion, the unfathomed energy of exist-

ence; or, in brief, the form-giving element in poetry he described as Apollinian, the energy he described as Dionysiac. He worked the theory out in his own way. But it is interesting to find the youngest of our new philosophers adopting and interpreting in modern terms the oldest doctrine of poetry, —namely, that it is a madness; and the distinction he draws serves to clarify our thoughts. Dionysus is the god who presides over the emotion as mere energy, as an intoxication, a physical and mental disturbance, an orgy of the muscles and the nerves, a dæmoniac possession. Apollo is the god who presides over inspiration rather in its intellectual issue as a power generating fair forms and clear-shining truths, of which poetry is the embodiment. If you will recall what I have just said, that in the mass of the phenomena there are all sorts of wasteful emotion, but amid them there is one thread of sense and reality, — there where the waste is, is Dionysus raving; there where the single thread is, is Apollo's shining hand.

There is one idea that played a great part

in Greek thought, — the idea of harmony. Apollo is the god of harmony. Now the Greeks believed that there is a principle of harmony in the world which takes body of itself. It is independent of man, but it may take body through his mind. Thus the great temple, the Parthenon, was a harmony brought into being by man, yet he did not make the harmony. This is the view so familiar to us in Emerson's poem: —

“These temples grew as grows the grass;
Art might obey, but not surpass:
The passive master lent his hand
To the vast soul that o'er him planned.”

That is, there is a principle of harmony in the world independent of art, but through art it takes form and becomes apparent to the eyes or ears or imagination of man. Apollo is the god who so guides the original energy of emotion that out of it issues this fair harmony known through the senses and their imagery to the perceptive powers, that is, to the mind of men. This is what, in the first lecture, was called the dream that attends emotion, the sensuous and intellectual part; but it was also there said that the dream is

not something added to emotion, but is the product of the emotion itself. The Dionysiac orgy ends in the physical state, and when the body is exhausted the emotion is spent and gone; the inspiration of Apollo ends in an intellectual harmony of poetry or music or other art, and this work abides after the emotion is spent,—is indeed the enduring and eternal form of that fleeting emotional overflow in the soul and body of the poet and artist. It was natural that inspiration should gradually become restricted, as a term, to this particular operation of emotion by virtue of which it realizes for the mind the principle of harmony, whether under the form of reason, — that is, of truth, — or under those forms of the senses which we call the arts. [Inspiration, then, is, in this view, emotion vivifying and giving clearness and speed to the intellect, out of whose store of memory and imagination it creates that dream in which it immortalizes its moment.] Emotion flooding the higher soul of man, and not merely his physical part, — flooding the rational soul, and there creatively productive according to the harmonic laws of that realm,

— that is the power of Apollo, that is inspiration in the artistic sense.

Wherein, then, is the madness? for it is agreed that the man so affected is out of his senses and not his own master; he is an instrument, a voice, not personal but oracular; a passive master, as Emerson says, who has lent his body and soul to the god. Is it, then, indeed, so strange? or is not this a thing familiar to us all in our daily lives? Do we not all have such moments, so charged with emotion that we seem taken out of ourselves, so filled with intensity of life that we seem unconscious, — moments when new truths come with a physical flash on the eye, when perceptions of beauty illuminate the soul with sudden and ample glory, when motions of love expand the spirit and pour it abroad, — and then comes darkness, and we fall from out the mood; but yet do not altogether fail, for the memory of the truth stays with us, that beauty has illuminated all our days, those motions of love have expanded the heart forever; it is on the memory of such moments that we live. You remember that Gray found these

moments, in their most intense, revealing and exalted power, in the times of bereavement; and I suppose that is the commonest experience of humanity. But in any part of experience they may arise, in its gloom or in its brightness; and when they arise is it not true, especially if the experience be prolonged or recurrent, that we seem to ourselves not entirely our own masters and to others somewhat out of our senses?

The difference that makes the poet lies in the fact that by some peculiarity of organization he stamps an image of his soul at such moments in a work of art, and what is for us a thing of the private life becomes through genius a thing of the public good. He, too, fails from out the mood, but this work of his remains; he feels in the same way as we the mystery of the experience; he cannot repeat it; he cannot summon the inspiration at will; he can only observe its times and seasons, and be in a state of preparedness for the god, —to use the religious phrase,—for inspiration has its conditions, like all mortal things, and these are subject to knowledge. If you will read Emerson's essay on Inspiration, you

will find that he employs nearly the whole of it in laying down these conditions; yet they might, I think, all be present, and the inspiration not occur.

Now, if you will apply what is true of our own lives to the life of the race in time, you will have a fair image of the relation of literature to civilization. The great poets, the great ages of poetry, are such selected and fortunate moments of the life of the race when the power of emotion was roused and released, and especially released in those harmonic forms of the rational soul, poetry, art, truth, which are all essentially forms of the reason; in these men the flowering of the soul takes place in time. The race lives long upon the memory of them, measures its own capacity by them, and believes that in them, if anywhere, it touches the divine pulses of the world. Poetic madness is thus no more than the common emotional experience of men in a form of higher intensity, and specially characterized by the trait that it leaves an artistic product in which the emotion is permanently recorded. Furthermore, it should be observed that men of genius oc-

cupy very often a position analogous to the primitive madman who does not conform his behavior to the ways of the tribe; the poet is by his nature somewhat lawless, especially when under the control of his genius; and he is often regarded, therefore, as dangerous, diabolical, denounced as an atheist and sent off into the desert, disowned and defamed; in other words, being the announcer of new moods and new truths, he is distrusted by men of the past and society as already organized in belief and practice; genius, in fact, is the principle of variation in society, it is the element in which the new comes to birth; and to the old the new always seems a madness because it is in contradiction with that past experience which is the test of sanity for the bulk of men. Poetic madness, then, is characterized not only by the fact that it leaves an artistic product, but also by the fact that this product is a new birth in the world.

Let us consider now, in the light of these conceptions, that course of changes in the beliefs and moods of men that we commonly denominate progress, of which great literatures

are the record. You will remember that I spoke of great literatures as being in the landscape of the mind like mountain ranges that mark the emotional upheavals of the race; and I have just spoken of them again as being the places where the race believes that it touches the divine pulses of the world. It is convenient to recur to the conception of Lucretius as he expresses it in the great invocation with which he begins his poem; he addresses the energy of nature and prays that this power which brings forth the spring-time will inspire his mind; inspiration, for him, is this breathing and awakening power in his mind, which is one with all power. He conceived of man as evolved out of nature without any divine intelligence in the process; the eye was not made to see nor the ear to hear, but these senses had arisen under the conditions existing and had become what they could; that was his theory. Man is born in the world of nature, and I suppose we shall all agree that man's life in nature as he rose through stages of animal and primitive life was a hard struggle; nature was not altogether his friend, and civilization slowly

won seems to have been won somewhat in spite of nature, and nature is still very indifferent to man and his fortunes; man exists by making what use he can of the foothold he has won in the world of natural law. Man is also born into a psychical world; that is, as his body is subject to natural law, his mind is subject to another sphere of law, the law of mind. Man's faculties have unfolded, we may suppose, in the same way as his senses, under the conditions of the case; they were not created but have evolved. Nor is there any reason to believe, so far as I can see, that the world of mind is any more friendly to man than the world of nature has shown itself to be. Certainly the race began by being merged in profound ignorance, and in its first steps it was plunged in universal error, especially in respect to what we call higher truth. It was long before the errors of the senses — as for example that the sun moves round the earth — were corrected. In the field of religion the first essays of the race were universally what we now call savage superstition, a realm of magic and senseless formulas, of the worship

of stones and animals, and it was long before the conception of immortality itself was other than a gloom or a curse; the way upward from the ideas and moods of primitive man to such ideas and moods as prevail in that small section of mankind which is called enlightened was as hard a way as the way of material civilization in nature has been. Man has always been in peril, and has often suffered. Emotion is one great part of psychical life; but it is plain that the history of emotion has been as much a record of disaster as the history of reason has been a record of error. If you read the history of religion and attend to the kind and quality and issue of emotion toward the divine, what an extraordinary chapter it is of folly and pain and evil! It is only slowly that emotion found out the useful and guiding ways, the illuminating, the humanizing ways of its life; just as slowly reason found out its true methods in thought.

Poetry, at its birth, marks the point of victory in this career, in this experimentation of emotional energy; thereafter it gave the scale of value to emotion. Emotion

had value in proportion as it became such inspiration as Lucretius prayed for, and passed into the intellect and was there discharged in poetry, or music, or sculpture, or other forms of art, and, in the scientific realm, of truth; there it evoked and bodied forth that principle of harmony which seems to be the main fact of the psychical world, the world of the perceptions, the world of mind. The function of poetry is to qualify the emotional life of the race as the function of science is to qualify its rational life. The test of emotion is its capacity to produce poetry, as the test of reason is its capacity to produce science. The wasteful and destructive emotion, the intoxication and raving, the physical exhaustion and death of Dionysus is laid off and avoided; the creative emotion issuing in harmonies of the mind which we call the life of the spirit, — this, the inspiration of Apollo, is preferred. The soul has a sure instinct in these matters; as a rule, it forgets the past rapidly and gladly, but it holds in its memory and clings invincibly to the great ages in which this harmony was most given out, — to poetry which

is the most immortal of human works, to art in all its culminating periods, to Greece as the most fruitful mother of both beauty and intellect under the guardianship of the Delphic inspiration.

The mood of the world changes. Race differs from race, and age from age, in mood as well as in ideas. Each race and age creates its own poetry, according to its place in civilization and the power of its life. I was much struck by the mood of the Mahometan religion, — by its sincerity, its dignity, and the fitness of the mood to the nature of the people. The bare and quiet mosques seemed to me a fitter place for the presence of the living god of the desert, the god of boundless nature, than any Christian cathedral I ever entered. In a Christian church I am apt to feel something of the confinement of a tomb, the air of one; the service seems a watch for the resurrection. Not only does race differ from race, but man from man in the mood of life; the test of the mood, of its value in the scale of worth, is its power to give out the noble dream, body forth a poetic form for itself, or if not to create one freshly, to

find one among those offered by the poets, musicians, artists, and prophets of the world. The service of the poets is to provide such forms of feeling for mankind. The variety of such forms now in the world is great in every field of life, in the Bibles of the race, in the battle songs of nations, in the love and death songs and the faith songs of many ages. The range of value in these is from the lowest to the highest; they are higher in proportion as they contain a more perfect beauty, a more pure truth, a more simple harmony of many elements.

- Is the inspiration, then, divine, and do all these forms proceed from one infinite power that prompts them? Many a poet and many a prophet has so affirmed it of his own work, — but when Mahomet says that he has talked with God, there is a grave shaking of heads. It would seem that Jehovah hardly escaped the curse he visited upon Babel, but has himself spoken to the nations in many tongues. It is not necessary to be too well assured. The name of the god adds nothing to the truth of the doctrine. The god of poetry is certainly, as Tennyson says, the

nameless one; the source of inspiration is no more known than the source of the other moods by which our being is sustained. It belongs to our sense of the infinite in which man feels he vaguely shares, that the inspiration is inexhaustible, and continually puts forth a new form. The diversity of these forms, viewed in their length and compass from the beginning and through the world, is one miracle; the second and greater miracle is that there is forever, age after age, an ever new birth of the hitherto unknown and unexpected. The mood of the world is forever renewed. The poets contain this element of promise; in them is the thing that shall be; they are the wings on which the new sphere swims into our ken. The infinite energy, of which Lucretius sang, has thus its times of putting forth in the race, its springtides of fresh abundance, its blossoming from age to age, from race to race; there is no finality in any of its blossoms; but it never ceases to put forth another and another strange and unknown flower.

I have spoken to but little purpose if I have not already made it plain that the poetic

energy, the emotion and the dream, the madness, is common to men and belongs to the soul by its own nature. The poetic life is not the privilege of some, but the path of all, and the passion and the power to lead it is the measure of every man's soul. Men may be great in other ways, great in trade and politics and war; but they are great in soul in proportion as they are poets. Just as in the original dancing horde all were poets, so is it still; there may be one among them who leads the dance, but all may join hands and voices and follow on in unison. The poetic impulse is universal; from the emotional urgency of life itself no one can escape, but he may avail himself of it only for the drunkenness of the senses, for the raving physical waste of the untaught, unbridled madness; but the man must have, besides the power of emotion which nature pours into him, the wise use of this power; and if he have wisdom in his soul, he will strive to be inducted rather into the choir of Apollo, and behold and share in those forms of beauty and truth in which the harmony of the world is seen, for these forms of beauty and truth,

revealed in poetry and shaped in art, are the intellectual children of emotion. In their company and gazing upon them and habituating his eyes to their presence, he will form his own soul after their pattern; for these works are so intimately bound with the emotion out of which they sprang into being, they are so instinct with its immortal vigor, that they generate the same emotion in the beholder according as he has power to receive it and take its form in his own soul; it is thus that the poets are the guardians of the soul. Their office is to nourish the poet that is in each one of us, and to free the poetic energy in our bosoms in noble forms of our own private life; for by commerce with the poets the creative energy steals into the breast, and there builds with original force in the life that is most inviolably our own and unshared by and unknown to the world. The great part of mankind lead this life mostly under the phases of religion, whose emotional modes are fixed in forms of dignity, beauty and power sanctioned by long use; but in other fields the poetic life is neglected.

I am the more struck, I think, as I grow

older, with the sense of how small a part of mankind, and how few persons in any generation, really possess the higher fruits of civilization; and consequently how frail is man's hold even on the good which he has so hardly won. It is not only liberty which can be quickly lost, but every supreme blessing. How intermittent and brief the life of the arts has been; how rare is a poetic age and how soon extinct, if one looks at the general history of the world! We are fortunate in the time of our birth, in our inherited poetry, and in the flourishing of reason among us; the opportunity for the poetic life is put into our hands; all of us, if we will, can acquire that wise use of emotion which I have tried to emphasize. For like all power, emotion is a thing of danger; in the hands of the foolish it often destroys them; and the wisest cannot better secure himself than by developing his emotions through the poets and their kindred. He will, so doing, find that emotion is the servant of the highest reason; for that principle of harmony which emotion gives out and unveils in its finite forms is the element that reason takes note of

as the eye takes note of light. The true opposition is between the infinite and the finite. Emotion lies in the sphere of the infinite; the infinite is inexhaustible, and hence there is no finality in the works of genius or in our own lives, as poets and artists are the first to confess, for they have no sooner finished their work than they are discontented with it and throw it aside. You will never seize the poet in his poem, for he has already left it; and the poem is only the prophet's garment that he leaves behind him in your hands. Inspiration resides in the infinite, in emotion. Reason, even the creative reason, is of the finite, the measured, the known; its works are renewed from the great deep, the throbbing of life itself, inexhaustibly; and hence after each of the great and glorious toils of genius, each emanation of the dream, whether individual or the labor of a race, when the last stroke is struck, the last word said, and the light begins to die off, — then emotion, which is of the infinite, again supervenes, still brooding in itself some new world, some new gospel of gladder tidings of greater joy.

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